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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7414th meeting
Wednesday, 25 March 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaite
	Malaysia	Mr. Haniff
	New Zealand	Mr. McLay
	Nigeria	Mr. Sarki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Child victims of non-State armed groups

Letter dated 6 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2015/168)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

Child victims of non-State armed groups

Letter dated 6 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the Secretary-General (S/2015/168)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Estonia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; Ms. Julie Bodin, Child Protection Technical Advisor, Save the Children International in the Central African Republic; and Mr. Junior Nzita, President of Paix pour l'enfance. We sincerely thank them all.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Stephen Evans, Assistant Secretary-General for Operations of NATO; and His Excellency Mr. Tete António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2015/168, which contains a letter dated 6 March 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and I now give him the floor.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): I thank the delegation of France for having organized this important debate, which is being held at an appopriate moment. The world's children are increasingly under threat in theatres of war. Last year seems to have been one of the worst ever for children in areas affected by conflict. An estimated 230 million children live in countries and areas where armed groups are fighting. Up to 15 million children were directly affected by the violence. The perpetrators of violations against children in armed conflict are increasingly diverse and brutal. It is our responsibility to bring these issues into the spotlight for discussion and action.

I would like to acknowledge the presence with us today of Mr. Junior Nzita Nsuami, a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Junior's example teaches us that, with appropriate assistance, a chance at education and continued support, it is possible to overcome the violence of a childhood spent fighting an adult war. Junior now dedicates his life to helping underprivileged children in Kinshasa, and his goal is to build a better future for them and for his country.

(*spoke in English*)

Globally, in conflict situations the main perpetrators of grave violations against children are armed groups.

These groups constitute the vast majority of parties listed in the annexes of my annual report on children and armed conflict. Since I last addressed the Council on this issue one year ago (see S/PV.7129), hundreds of thousands more children have been confronted with the emergence or intensification of conflict, and have endured new and grave threats posed by armed groups. Sadly, this includes some of the worst human rights violations a child can experience, including death, injury, imprisonment and torture, sexual abuse, forced recruitment and abduction. There is rarely anyone to hear their protests or advocate for their rights. The rise of violent extremism in conflict areas is particularly disturbing.

The tactics of groups such as Daesh and Boko Haram make little distinction between civilians and combatants. These groups not only constitute a threat to international peace and security, but often target girls and boys. No cause can justify such acts. Children have the right to be protected in their schools, in their homes and in their communities. Increasingly, children are snatched from a normal life of school and family, abducted by armed groups and thrown into a life of violence and horror. From north-eastern Nigeria to Iraq, from South Sudan to Syria, we have witnessed a wave of such abductions used to terrorize and humiliate entire communities. How can we forget the images of the girls from Chibok, stolen from their school dormitory and still missing? Our agencies on the ground tell us that they are verifying more and more cases of child abductions. That is why I urge Member States to work with us to strengthen our prevention and response mechanisms.

We agree that we cannot tolerate a world in which children are killed and maimed, where they are abducted, subject to sexual violence, forced to become soldiers, and where schools and hospitals are attacked. That is why we engage not just with Governments but also with armed groups to stop grave violations against children. My Special Representative has worked with many such groups, and will work with more, to ensure that we are doing our utmost to protect children in these most difficult environments.

The resolutions adopted by the Council over the past 16 years have built a solid framework and given us tools to better engage with Governments and non-State actors not only to end but also to prevent these violations. We have seen concrete outcomes of our efforts that have translated into thousands of children now going to school instead of battle, and playing in fields instead of fighting on them. By protecting children, we contribute to building durable peace and to helping countries reach their full potential. But we must act collectively, and expeditiously. I call on the international community to continue supporting this work and this mandate, and to always ensure that the children's best interests are at the heart of any response we undertake.

Allow me to end on a positive note. I would like to take this opportunity to commend my Special Representative and UNICEF for their campaign "Children Not Soldiers", which they launched a year ago to end the recruitment and use of children by Government forces by 2016. The progress they have accomplished to date is encouraging. With the support of the United Nations, Chad completed all the requirements to make its army child-free. Six of the seven countries involved in the campaign are now engaged with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment of children in their security forces, and some of them are making commendable progress. That would have been unthinkable just a few years ago, but we still have a long road ahead of us to transform those commitments into reality for thousands of children.

I count on all the members of the Security Council, the members of the international community and all stakeholders to assist in those efforts wherever possible. The children of the world should be students, not soldiers. They deserve to grow up in communities that offer them safety and a chance to reach their full potential. Those are fundament rights of all children, not aspirations. Member States have the obligation to take all the necessary measures to fulfil them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougi.

Ms. Zerrougi (*spoke in French*): Let me first thank France for organizing this open debate on the plight of children in armed conflict, and for its continued support for my mandate. I am delighted that the Security Council continues to consider the issue of children affected by armed conflict as a priority.

However, I find it regrettable that, in spite of the consensus and our combined efforts to spare children the horrors of war, we are faced with new challenges every year. At the beginning of 2015, it is the violence of armed groups and the brutality with which they treat

children that pose our major challenge. That is the case in Syria, Iraq and Nigeria, but also in other countries. Recurring conflicts have intensified, and the growth of armed groups is taking on alarming proportions. The members of the Council have just returned from the Central African Republic, where thousands of children continue to be associated with armed groups. The challenges to protecting them certainly did not escape the Council. Today's debate is for all those children, for we must continue our efforts and adapt our response to the enormous challenges that face us.

As the Secretary-General reminded us, armed groups constitute the vast majority of perpetrators of violations against children. They make up 51 of the 59 actors listed in the annexes to the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of children in armed conflict. As he also just mentioned, armed groups professing extremist ideologies seize large areas, erase borders, use increasingly brutal tactics and take advantage of modern communication technologies as part of their recruitment campaigns as well as to illustrate their brutality. As evidenced by the actions of Daesh and Boko Haram, mass abduction of women and children is becoming a tactic of war routinely used to terrorize, humiliate and subjugate entire communities. Abducted children are also used for recruitment purposes and to carry out all sorts of tasks, including acting as human shields and using little girls to commit suicide attacks. The abduction of children has always been a component of conflicts, and we report annually to the Council on such violations. However, mass kidnappings have increased in several conflict zones. That is why I call on the Council to give its full attention to this disturbing phenomenon.

Schools and hospitals are not spared, as evidenced by the recurrent attacks by Boko Haram and the attack last December by Tahrik-i-Taliban on school in Peshawar, in which 132 children were massacred and 133 injured. But schools are not only attacked in order to kill, they are also to indoctrinate and radicalize future generations.

In virtually every conflict situation, girl victims too often remain in the shadows. They suffer the same abuse as boys, but also the violence that affects simply for being girls. They are raped, "married" to armed groups or forced into sexual slavery. Their right to education is denied. While progress has been made, much remains to be done to effectively address the challenges and complexity of the situations faced by girls.

It is important to remember that it is possible to engage in constructive dialogue with armed groups, although such groups are not a homogeneous. Their structure, claims and aspirations are diverse. Access and communication with them are not always easy. As part of my mandate, I try to favour an approach that takes into account the context and uses every opportunity possible for engagement.

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), I want to emphasize that the tools adopted by the Council have shown their effectiveness. The majority of the 23 action plans signed so far has been with armed groups. Other dialogue processes are under way. The United Nations and other stakeholders from civil society are also engaged on the ground to stop the violations and negotiate the release of children. That is the case particularly in South Sudan, where the David Yau Yau armed group recently released and handed over more than 1,300 children to national and international child protection personnel. In the Central African Republic and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations awareness-raising activities with armed groups led to the release nearly 4,000 children in 2014. In Darfur, an ongoing commitment on the part of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur has led some groups to take concrete measures to end the recruitment and use of children. It is also the case in Mali, where the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission has been given a commitment by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and and other armed groups to stop violations against children.

Mediation and peace processes represent an entry point for securing firm commitments from the parties to halt and prevent violations. That was possible both in the Central African Republic with the Brazzaville agreement, as well as in the context of the peace process in the Philippines. However, we need to ensure that child protection is part of coherent and systematic negotiations and that it be reflected in any peace agreement. I ask for the support of the Council and all partners in including child protection as essential for building a lasting peace.

For armed groups unreceptive to a dialogue with the United Nations, it is imperative to identify and activate the pressure means that each of us can use

to get them to stop violations against children. A multidimensional approach is needed. In addition to military pressure, which is beneficial in some situations, we must not overlook the importance of legal pressure and sanctions. But to achieve that we must work to strengthen the national judicial response and international cooperation in criminal matters. Those tools are essential to combatting impunity, terrorism and transnational organized crime.

The initiatives taken by States and the entire international community to address the threat that extremist groups pose to international peace and security are needed, but we need to ensure that such measures do not create new risks for children. The answer, therefore, as the Council has often reminded — and I thank it for that — must be conducted in compliance with international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. The measures taken to combat these groups should be well supervised to prevent violations and the stigmatization of entire communities.

That is all the more important given the fact that militias are often associated with the fight against terrorism. The response must also address the root causes that have led to the emergence of these groups. That is the only way to isolate them, delegitimize their speech and rally the support of the people.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for children involved in or suspected of association with armed groups are arrested and detained, sometimes in deplorable conditions and without charge or trial. When they are charged, they are brought before special or military courts, which deprives them of their right to impartial justice or any kind of reparations and does not take into account their status as minors. Children associated with armed groups are first and foremost victims, victims of these groups and of our inability to ensure their protection. I would like to take this opportunity to plead in their favour.

The successful reintegration of children from armed groups is an essential component of sustainable peace. It is also a tool for preventing the recruitment of children. Nevertheless, is not always easy to develop and support programmes that are well adapted to the needs of children and communities where opportunities are limited. New challenges can be seen with regard to the reintegration of children associated with extremist groups, who have been exposed to their violence and indoctrinated by a radical ideology. The impact of their association with such these groups can mark them for life. Their reintegration requires structured programmes that are specially adapted for their needs. That is why I call for the Council's support for such programme, which are essential to rebuilding the future of these children and their communities.

The campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" is a little more than a year old now. It was launched jointly with UNICEF and aims, as the Secretary-General pointed out, to put an end to the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by the end of 2016. The Council's support has enabled us to make significant progress. However, a little less than two years away from that deadline, a tremendous amount of work remains to be done. The conflicts in South Sudan and in Yemen remind us that the progress made can be reversed and give rise to new challenges. It is essential that we learn lessons from these crises and work with all our partners to build on what has been achieved and ensure that the measures put in place are institutionalized and sustained.

I should like to stress that the majority of the armed groups mentioned by the Secretary-General operate in the countries covered by the campaign. To put an end to and prevent the recruitment of children in national armed and security forces also requires that measures be put in place that will help these Governments and the international community address the violations committed by non-State actors against children.

In conclusion, I urge the Council to continue its efforts and use all of the tools at its disposal to protect children affected by armed conflicts. Its mobilization and support are indispensable in order to address new challenges and better protect children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Brandt.

Ms. Brandt: Let me start by thanking the Secretary-General for his leadership and support; Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for her relentless efforts to protect children in the midst of conflict and instability; France for using its leadership of the Security Council to shine a light on the continued crisis of children trapped by conflict; Malaysia, as Chair of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict; Julie Bodin of Save the Children, an essential partner for UNICEF in addressing the issue of

the recruitment and use of children; and Junior Nzita Nsuami, President of Paix pour l'enfance.

Last year, in 2014, the world celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And yet, in so many countries around the world, as the Secretary-General just pointed out, 2014 was the worst year in which to be a child.

This year, we celebrate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and the eighth anniversary of the Paris Principles, now endorsed by 105 States. And yet this year, the world's youngest citizens in Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, Nigeria, Mali and the Central African Republic are still being recruited into armed groups, used, orphaned, killed — their lives stolen, their innocence lost.

When a boy is abducted from his village and made to fight; when a girl is taken from her family, exploited and abused; when children are targeted because of their ethnicity or religion; and when a child witnesses massacres and sees the worst of humanity, rather than the best, we are rightfully outraged.

But our outrage is not enough. Our outrage must be matched by action to end and prevent all grave violations of child rights, by making abduction a trigger for the listing of parties to conflict in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, by encouraging more States to endorse the Paris Principles and by working directly with all parties to release and integrate children, and by working on measures such as age verification, screening and improved monitoring to prevent such things from happening.

Yes, we are seeing some signs of success. Recently, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General just stated, about 3,000 children were released from the Cobra faction in South Sudan, and we hope that more will be released soon, as the process is still ongoing.

But being released is only a first step. Imagine the struggles such children face when they return to their communities; their psychological wounds, the pain and stigmatization they live with, the mistrust in their neighbours' eyes.

Consider the more than 140 Kurdish children abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Aleppo last May and held for four months. Now released, they tell of horrifying abuse: beatings with water pipes and electrical cables; being forced to watch violent videos of battles, beatings and executions; and starvation. Yes, these children have experienced the worst of humanity. After all they have endured, how can we expect these children, and so many like them around the world, to overcome their suffering and be able, and willing, to build their lives anew? They need our immediate support.

UNICEF and the South Sudan Government are therefore working together to care for and protect released children in interim care centres, where they receive food, clothing and health care as well as counselling and programmes to address sexual and gender-based violence. Most are now reunited with their families and will be going to school and receiving vocational training to improve their chances of finding a job, earning a living and contributing to their families and communities. Let me here echo the call made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for support to these essential programmes.

In the Central African Republic, over 2,800 children associated with the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka armed groups have now been released. UNICEF is now working with the communities to reintegrate these children and assist the nearly 10,000 others still associated with these groups. Such efforts not only help these children begin the long process of rebuilding their lives; they also send a powerful message to each and every child who has survived: "Your life matters, your future matters, you matter". They send a message to all armed groups and armed forces that the use of children in armed conflict, in any way, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

They also send a message to these children's communities and, indeed, to the world, that children who experience conflict are not without hope. We cannot give up on them, and we can rebuild shattered lives and shattered societies. Because as we heal these children, we also heal divided societies by erasing the stigma that released children face and building peace and, most importantly, hope. As one released South Sudanese boy said,

> "I really want to go to school now. I have never been to school, and, after I finish, I want to help the people in my community — to help them get food. If I had children, I would never let them be soldiers".

Together, let us make 2015 a year of progress for children like this, who have great hope for the future

and the generous, humane spirit required to translate this hope into reality.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Brandt for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bodin.

Ms. Bodin (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Save the Children, I thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to address the Security Council at this important debate. Save the Children works in many countries affected by armed conflict, delivering life-saving assistance to millions of children and families in need. In New York, we are also an active member of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. As a child protection adviser with Save the Children in the Central African Republic, I work on a daily basis with girls and boys impacted by conflict.

Drawing on Save the Children's experience in situations of armed conflict around the world, I will focus my remarks today on three areas: engagement with armed groups, building protective environments for children and the reintegration of children.

Save the Children's engagement with non-State armed groups is guided by the single goal of protecting children from violence, including their recruitment and use by armed groups. Action plans in which parties to armed conflict commit to measures to end violations are one route to achieving the goal. In that regard, the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, led by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and by UNICEF, shows the potential for impact with State security forces. Action plans have also proven to be an effective tool for ending grave violations against children by armed groups and should be pursued proactively wherever possible. We call on States to facilitate access for the United Nations and other specialized child-protection actors to armed groups, and we also call upon the United Nations to redouble its efforts to engage with armed groups to get them to agree to and implement action plans.

However, interventions with armed groups must be tailored to each group and the specific contexts in which they operate. In the Central African Republic, we are faced with multiple armed groups, often with weak command structures and little or no knowledge of international standards and norms. In that context, formal agreements may not be feasible with the leaders. Instead, Save the Children has adopted a case-by-case approach, enabling us to establish a dialogue with around 20 individual anti-Balaka commanders at the local level to build trust. We were also then able to present the humanitarian protection principles and secure the release of children. Since November 2013, more than 800 girls and boys have been released through interventions by Save the Children and other organizations.

One of them, whom I will call Eric, is now 15 years old. Eric joined an anti-Balaka group after his house was burnt down and he became separated from his parents during fighting between the anti-Balaka and ex-Séleka groups in December 2013. While with the group, he acted as a spy and a courier and took part in attacks. In July 2014, following a series of child protection training sessions and briefings run by Save the Children's national team with his commanders, Eric and nine other children were handed over to us. Today, we have yet to locate his parents. He is living with a foster family and is learning to be a carpenter, and his prospects are good.

Elsewhere, Save the Children seeks to support the United Nations engagement with armed groups. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, we support community-based child-protection networks to enable communities to alert and report to the United Nations system and local authorities on grave violations of children's rights, including the abduction and recruitment of children by armed groups. However, where United Nations engagement with armed groups is not possible, complementary approaches should be supported. Commitments secured from non-State armed groups by international non-governmental organizations, such as the Geneva Call or local community-based organizations, can result in immediate protection for children. They can also serve as stepping stones towards action plans. That is why Save the Children calls upon the United Nations to strengthen its cooperation with non-governmental child-protection stakeholders to develop coordinated strategies in pursuit of the shared goal of ending and preventing the grave violations being committed against children by armed groups.

We also stress the importance of supporting national authorities in the design and implementation of formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. We must consider the gender issue. Securing the release of girls associated with armed groups is a

particular challenge in all of the situations in which we work. They are often hidden from view and frequently regarded not as members of the group but as "wives". We therefore remind the Council of the importance of developing gender-specific strategies for the release and reintegration of girls associated with armed groups.

In addition to the engagement with non-State armed groups, Save the Children emphasizes prevention as an important component of all our programmes. In Colombia, for example, our programmes aim to strengthen the protective environment for children by working closely with communities, schools and local authorities to build local resilience and response mechanisms. Save the Children's experience shows that education and livelihood support are important factors in both prevention and reintegration. Access to quality education and income generation offers a route out of the poverty that often underpins armed conflict and drives child recruitment. For children formerly associated with armed forces or groups, education also provides a sense of normality and purpose and increases their chances of successful reintegration.

For that reason, the protection of education is critical. Pursuant to resolution 2143 (2014), we urge Member States and all parties to conflict, including armed groups, to take concrete measures to prevent the military use of schools during armed conflict by implementing and disseminating the available guidance included, for example, in the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's Guidance Note on Attacks against Schools and Hospitals and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. State endorsement of the Guidelines, through the signing of the Safe Schools Initiative and the practical implementation of the Guidelines, will contribute to establishing best practices and thereby enhance the protection of schools.

Reintegration programmes also need to be adapted to the context and must be planned as part of the development of action plans or other strategies. In the Central African Republic, because many children are recruited by family or community members, we are using community-based, rather than individual, approaches. Our reintegration programmes there and elsewhere promote psychosocial well-being by creating opportunities for children and youth to rebuild relations and develop critical life skills to enhance their resilience. We also provide socioeconomic support to vulnerable youth, including those formerly associated with armed groups, through livelihood training and other means of community-based economic support.

However, the effective reintegration and strengthening of protection systems require sustained, long-term interventions. Save the Children calls on States Members of the United Nations and donors to provide long-term financial support to prevention and reintegration programmes. Moreover, Save the Children is pursuing coordination activities with various actors aimed at supporting reconciliation and peacebuilding, rebuilding education and child protection systems, and economic recovery. That must be reinforced by the actions of States and the international community to ensure that there are consequences for those who commit grave violations against children. Individuals committing such violations must be held accountable within the framework of the efforts being undertaken to provide remedies for violations. Save the Children calls on the Council to support comprehensive transitional-justice measures in tandem with action plans and other approaches to armed groups.

Our work and that of other child protection actors relies on a minimum level of security, for which we often rely on United Nations operations and other peacekeeping operations. We call on Member States of the United Nations to ensure the rapid deployment of all forces authorized to participate in peacekeeping operations and to ensure that peacekeepers will be deployed where children are at most risk. However, peacekeepers must be able to guarantee the safety and rights of children and not pose a threat themselves. For this reason, peacekeeping officers must receive comprehensive training on child protection prior to deployment.

Finally, Save the Children also wants to add its voice to the call made to the Secretary-General to develop a policy that prohibits listed Government security forces from contributing their troops to United Nations missions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Bodin for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Nzita.

Mr. Nzita (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to thank the presidency for giving me this opportunity to come and speak here. It is a great honour for me to be speaking for the first time before the Security Council

in order to make my modest contribution and share my personal experience, as well as the experience of my compatriots with whom I endured the ordeal of forced recruitment. But before that, I would like to express my full appreciation to the people and organizations who have worked, and who continue to work, so that the voice of the child victims of recruitment into armed groups, who are victims of war, are heard, and the scourge of recruiting children into armed groups and armed forces can be eradicated.

As I speak to the Council today, I must say that I have lived through these torments myself. I still have difficulty in finding the right words to describe this ordeal, which stole my childhood from me. I was a victim of recruitment by the armed group called Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre, created in North Kivu to overthrow the dictatorial regime of President Mobutu. I was 12 years old. I and several of my friends were forcibly recruited in our school, and we waged war, in spite of ourselves, in order to overthrow the Mobutu regime.

The recruiters gave us expedited training. We were sent to the front. We killed, we looted and we destroyed infrastructure that was useful to the population. We did everything that we were asked to do, violating the rules of international humanitarian law. We transported cases of ammunition, we walked thousands of kilometres on foot with just one belief: we must fire on everything that moves lest we be fired upon ourselves. Innocent lives were destroyed for no reason. Allow me to reiterate my apologies for all the harm that we caused to our fellow human beings. I continue to regret it.

In order to make us more capable of performing that dirty work, our recruiters succeeded in awakening in us animal instincts that were slumbering there. In magic ceremonies, they convinced us that we were invincible, but reality always showed us that the opposite was true. Many of my brothers-in-arms are no longer alive after having climbed very high on the ladder of violence. I was associated with the group for 10 years, and I waged war for 3 of those years.

The hardest thing was to see young children of my age playing on a football field not far from the plot of land where I was standing guard. And at night, when I was standing guard in the cold outside the gate, I saw again the image of those children playing, and pain filled my heart. My eyes full of tears, I asked myself very softly: "Oh God, what did I do that I cannot be like them?"

Fate intervened and in 2006 I was able to be demobilized and was called upon to be reintegrated into the society through a programme run by the national commission for disarmament and reintegration, with the assistance of the international community, the Congolese Government and civil society. In that regard, it is important to emphasize that, although my years as a child soldier were an ordeal for me and other child soldiers, demobilization and reintegration enabled me to rebuild myself psychologically in order to face life with confidence and to turn the page on my past. I was able to resume my studies and take control of my life. I also attempted to tell the story of what I lived through in my book, *If My Life as a Child Soldier Could Be Told*.

Urged on by this confidence, I decided to create a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Peace for Childhood, which does a lot of work to promote and protect the rights of the child. For those who would like to know more about our association they can go to our website: https://paixpourlenfance.wordpress.com/.

I am dedicating my life to helping children and to helping my country to rebuild a better future. In my country there are still thousands of children who are living through an anxiety that I know all too well. Personally, I decided to fight to the end so that what I went through myself will no longer happen to others. A little more than a year ago, I was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for the implementation of the action plan to end child recruitment into the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and, more broadly, to end the recruitment and use of children by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am also an ambassador for the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" and for the Congolese campaign "No More Kadogo".

In October 2012, by signing an action plan with the United Nations, the Government of the Congo committed itself to bringing an end to and preventing the recruitment of child soldiers in the Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo (FARDC). For me, who was a member of an armed group that was integrated into the FARDC, the commitment of the Government of my country to bring an end to the recruitment and use of children is historic, and represents an opportunity that has the potential to protect the lives of thousands of children. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo the progress of the Government forces are undeniable, but there are still dozens of armed groups,

particularly in the east of the country, that continue to recruit thousands of children.

While awareness-raising about the problems is important at the international level, it is also essential at the local level. We must dismantle false beliefs and we must develop a consensus in post-conflict countries, so that everyone understands that the place of a child is with his or her family, in school, and not on a battlefield or supporting military operations. Everyone must know that children must be protected.

As a Goodwill Ambassador for the implementation of the action plan and through my NGO, and with the support of diplomatic missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I have spent recent months leading outreach meetings in schools in order to combat the recruitment of children into armed conflicts and to invite Congolese youth to commit themselves to assisting and facilitating social reintegration of former child armed forces and armed groups over the long term. I also travel throughout the world to share my experience and to spread awareness about the problem of child recruitment.

To be a child soldier is to be torn from one's life as a child and to be forced to become an adult. In order to succeed in reclaiming one's life path, a former child soldier should be viewed as a person in need of healing. I would like to stress the importance demobilization and reintegration programmes.

I cannot conclude my statement without commending the tireless efforts of the United Nations and all the organizations devoted to the protection of children, especially UNICEF and the departments of child protection of the various peacekeeping missions, in particular that of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, along with the diplomatic missions in my country, my country's own missions and those of civil society. Without them, we would be what our recruiters wanted us to be. I hope they feel duly recognized by my humble contribution to this debate and that this meeting will be the occasion to set in motion solid strategies capable of saving the thousands of children who await our help.

The President (*spoke in French*): I warmly thank Mr. Nzita for his briefing and for his moving testimony.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I thank the Secretary-General for his presence here today.

I would like, at the outset, to convey my warmest appreciation to the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings and their commitment. I also express my heartfelt appreciation to Ms. Bodin and Mr. Nzita for their poignant testimonies, which have enabled us to better grasp the tragic reality and extreme complexity of the situation of child victims of armed groups and non-State actors. Their testimony is also a powerful message of hope that confers on all of us the responsibilty to act.

The scenes of violence depicted in Mr. Junior Nzita's book, *If My Life as a Child Soldier Could Be Told*, is unfortunately the daily reality of thousands of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Syria, Iraq and other countries. Among those serious violations, I would like today to stress the role of abductions, 80 per cent of which are committed by non-State armed groups and have become a systematic terror tactic used by extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Daesh. The situation is especially difficult for girls, who are subjected to sexual violence and forced into slavery, marriage and pregnancies, which make it all the more difficult to separate them from armed groups. It is important to forcefuily condemn the barbaric violence of armed groups, but that is not enough. The time has come for us to act more effectively on the ground, as we have heard today.

In that regard, the work being overseen by Ms. Zerroughi is remarkable. Today, 14 non-State armed groups have signed action plans that commit them to cease violations with regard to children; seven of them have been removed from the lists annexed to the Secretary-General's annual reports. By the same token, UNICEF has also made considerable progress. In the Central African Republic, 1,623 children associated with non-State armed groups were demobilized and reintegrated in 2014, thanks to a programmed supported and financed by France. But the Security Council's efforts with local authorities and civil society during its trip to the Central African Republic 10 days ago showed that the challenges remain immense. Given the scale of the task we face, we need to be prepared, proactive and concrete. In that regard, I would like to

propose three new modes and levels of action as a blue print for action plans.

First of all, we must act at the diplomatic and political levels. States are the key actors for establishing the necessary climate of trust for the United Nations, the Special Representative and actors on the ground to be able to promote action plans. Such efforts produced results in the Philippines, for example, where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front reaffirmed in 2014 its adherence to the action plan signed in 2009 to prevent the recruitment of children. Mediators and special envoys need to more systematically integrate activities related to child protection in their projects. The protection of children must be a concern and a priority not only within the framework of peace accords, as in the case of Mali or the Central African Republic, or in ceasefire agreements, but also in the absence or even the failure of peace negotiations, as is often the case. France therefore proposes the development of United Nations guidelines for mediators on the protection and liberation of children. Negotiators are able to wield greater weight when they can apply pressure through mechanisms such as sanctions and the Secretary-General's black list. It is time to update resolution 1612 (2005) to include abduction as a serious violation capable of triggering the addition of the guilty parties to that list of infamy. We fully support the efforts by Malaysia in that regard.

Secondly, we must act at the operational level, throughout all the phases of a conflict. In a world in which preventive action is essential, particularly in the realm of education, we might look to Pakistan, for example, where terrorist groups are fighting against the education of girls and are targeting schools. Elsewhere, for example in Central African Republic, in Boali and Yaloke, some children who were already attending school before the conflict ended up leaving their classrooms to join the anti-Balaka forces. Preventive measures must also therefore include information campaigns about armed groups in schools and on the radio or via other forms of communication in order to discourage children from joining such groups. And in the midst of conflict, tools adapted to those already involved in combat must be provided. Military personnel, peacekeepers and regional security forces must be provided with clear strategies or operational concepts as well as with regular training to enable them to act with caution when they find themselves faced with child soldiers, often on the front lines, whom they seek to separate from armed non-State groups and hand over to child protection services. In that context, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has a clear role to play in maintaining its strategies and proposing specific, targeted training. The document recently adopted by NATO on the protection of children in armed conflict is also an interesting example.

Finally, once a child has been freed from the clutches of an armed group we must facilitate and, above all, as has been rightly emphasized, ensure his reintegration into his family and community. States are responsible for implementing strategies for demobilization, disarmament and reintegration specifically designed for children, with special attention to the situation of girls. The situation of girls needs to be the subject of a more granular and methodical statistical follow-up as part of the follow-up reporting mechanism; only that will make it possible to implement solutions more adequately adapted to their protection and reintegration.

My third and last proposal concerns the need to deepen our actions with respect to the law. The fight against impunity, which has also been mentioned, remains indispensable for discouraging and preventing serious violations by new actors. I would like to highlight the message from the International Criminal Court (ICC) whose first judgement, upheld on appeal, found Thomas Lubanga guilty of the crimes of enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15. The ICC is currently developing a comprehensive strategy on the protection of children, an initiative that we fully encourage and commend. States must take responsibility by ratifying international instruments such as the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention of 1977 and the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 2000 and 2011. France also calls on all countries to adhere to the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments of 2007 as an essential point. For non-State armed groups, the signing of action plans or acts of engagement is essential. Such tools usefully guide our action against violations of the rights of children in armed conflict.

This year marks 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005). It is our collective duty to be more visibly active and more committed, more responsive and more effective with respect to the protection of children in armed conflict. The fight to protect children in armed conflict involves each and every one of us. The community of nations must join together to condemn it and, above all, to take action. As

Mr. Junior Nzita's testimony has taught us, we should and we can win the battle together.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): At the outset, allow me to commend you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict. We believe that the focus of today's debate on children victims of non-State armed groups is timely and important. We are also appreciative of your efforts to synthesize the discussion today and of the proposals put forth in a non-paper, which we hope will provide a useful reference for our future work on this issue.

I wish to thank Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his remarks, as well as Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, for their briefings. My delegation also wishes to express our special appreciation to Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita for sharing their valuable and insightful experiences on the ground in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

There can be no doubt of our shared international commitment to safeguarding and protecting children in situations of armed conflict, developed over the past 15 years in the Security Council. We are pleased to recognize that this year marks the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which endorsed the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to document grave violations against children in armed conflict and set up the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which Malaysia is privileged to Chair. Successive Security Council resolutions and presidential statements have further reinforced our resolve and expanded the range of instruments that can be used to shield children from the harms of warfare.

Yet the consequences of warfare remain a grim reality for millions of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF reported that 2014 was the worst year for children, with up to 15 million suffering the fallout from armed conflict in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, the occupied Palestinian territories, Syria and Ukraine. For instance, last year's war in Gaza led to the deaths of over 500 Palestinian children, some of whom were deliberately targeted and killed while playing at the beach or seeking refuge at United Nations centres. More than 3,000 children were injured or maimed for life, schools were attacked, 54,000 children were made homeless and at least 373,000 children in Gaza are currently in desperate need of psychosocial support.

Clearly, more needs to be done to end impunity and prevent grave violations committed against children. In that regard, Malaysia strongly believes that all parties should be held accountable for gross violations of children's rights, be they State or non-State actors. No one should be allowed to be above the law.

We underline that Governments hold the primary responsibility for the protection of children within their territory. In this light, we are heartened by the progress made in the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which galvanizes Government action to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed forces in seven countries. We call for the strong support of the international community to ensure that the objective of the campaign is achieved by 2016.

At the same time, we are conscious of the fact that non-State armed groups make up the majority of the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/339). The listings are representative of a wide array of organizations, with a host of diverse motives and operating in vastly different circumstances. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that there can be no one-size-fits-all approach in addressing non-State armed groups — each must be dealt with while taking into account the unique contexts in which they operate. In that regard, we believe that further analysis on non-State armed groups would be valuable to ensure a tailored approach, both by operational actors on the ground as well as by the Security Council.

Our discussion today raises crucial questions as to how the tools at our disposal can be best used to influence non-State armed groups to safeguard the lives of children. We wish to highlight several non-exhaustive areas where we believe concrete action can be undertaken in this regard.

We emphasize the importance for the United Nations and Member States to consult and cooperate

closely with each other in dealing with non-State armed groups to ensure that sustainable measures to improve the situation of children in armed conflict can be undertaken. Malaysia believes that peace processes provide a critical forum of engagement with non-State armed groups. We call for child protection provisions to be integrated into all peace processes, negotiations and agreements. In that regard, we recognize the great value of the Guidance for Mediators on Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements, issued by the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs in 2012. We believe that a similar guidance note to address grave violations against children would provide a much needed reference to ensure that child protection concerns are mainstreamed into ceasefire and peace agreements.

In January this year, the international community was shocked by the use of a seven-year-old girl by Boko Haram as a suicide bomber, tragically killing herself and five others at a marketplace in Nigeria. We express our strongest condemnation of the gross violations and abuses committed by terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, against children, including the recruitment and use of children as combatants, suicide bombers and executioners.

We are also deeply concerned about the alarming trend in the abduction of children by terrorist groups and militias. Hundreds of children have been abducted in the past year by armed groups in Africa and the Middle East, many of whose fates are still unknown, including the 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria, taken in April 2014. Others, such as the 89 boys abducted in South Sudan in February 2015, have been forcibly recruited for combat purposes. Just today we read reports that 500 more women and children had been abducted by Boko Haram. Those violations are deplorable and cause untold suffering to families and communities.

While the horrific mass abductions have brought widespread attention to these occurrences at the international stage, abduction has long been used as a tactic by non-State armed groups, and is often the precursor to other grave violations. We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all children held captive by armed groups. In that regard, we believe that it is timely for the Security Council to underscore its condemnation of child abduction by recognizing abduction in armed conflict as a trigger for listing in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report.

We must be clear that ending and preventing grave violations against children is only one side of the coin. Equally important is ensuring that mechanisms and programmes are in place to facilitate the reintegration and rehabilitation of children who have been victimized by armed groups back into their communities. In that regard, the Paris Principles remain an instrumental framework that continues to guide efforts in the release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups.

As the Principles themselves detail, the special needs of girls, who are at greater risk of rape and sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, must be taken into account in reintegration strategies. We also wish to highlight the plight of second-generation victims of armed conflict, namely, the children born of war, and the need to recognize this segment as a victim group in post-conflict settings.

We emphasize that reintegration is a long-term effort that requires the collective responsibility of all stakeholders, including the international community. In that regard, we also fully support community-based reintegration programmes that can foster a spirit of unity and reconciliation among communities that have been ravaged by war.

In conclusion, the concerted efforts of all actors is vital in reigning in and ending the grievous violations and abuses committed against children, whether by States or non-State actors. I assure you of my delegation's commitment to play a constructive role towards that end.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate and for giving us three action points: action at the diplomatic level, action in operational terms, and stepping up judicial cooperation, all of which are very much at the core of the issues we have to discuss, and which I will address in the course of my statement.

I thank the Secretary-General for his strong statement and for the ongoing commitment of the United Nations to this cause. I would also like to thank the four briefers, not just for their statements, but also for their dedication to what is, by any standards, a noble cause. New Zealand strongly supports the children and armed conflict agenda, and reaffirms its support for

the Paris Commitments and the Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. It also supports the development of the Safe Schools Declaration. We share the outrage of UNICEF at the many situations that we deal with day to day.

As you emphasized, Sir, the majority of those who commit some of the most egregious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law against children listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/339) are non-State armed groups. And, for that, as the representative of Save the Children emphasized, there must be consequences. There can be no impunity. Good work has been done to address this, with effective cooperation between the United Nations, States and non-State actors, but we must do more. As States, our own actions must match those we expect of non-State armed groups. Whether it be agreeing on an action plan, supporting the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, or providing child protection training for our peacekeepers, all 193 of us can do much better. We can certainly do something.

For its part, the United Nations must effectively implement its own human rights due diligence policy, and it must undertake thorough vetting of its staff. As you have proposed, and as the representative of Malaysia also emphasized, child protection training should be mandatory for all uniformed and civilian peace-keeping personnel. More can be done to mainstream child protection approaches across the whole of the work of the United Nations. We would particularly welcome the provision of guidance for mediators on addressing conflict-related violations against children in ceasefire and peace agreements, and the inclusion of relevant child protection expertise in expert groups on sanctions.

Regional organizations also have a role to play. The declaration agreed between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the African Union is an excellent example. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict made clear to us, engaging non-State armed groups to prevent abuses against children is complex and sensitive. They have different motives, tactics, structures and degrees of cohesiveness. Extremist groups can also often pose particular challenges. However, experience does show us that, in the right circumstances, engaging such groups can produce results — particularly agreement on action plans.

We therefore encourage enhanced cooperation between governments, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and relevant child protection actors to ensure that more of these action plans are agreed with non-State armed groups. It is critical that we find ways to incentivize their engagement — and there, civil society often enjoys an access and legitimacy that is denied to others. The example of Eric, given to us by Save the Children, bears witness to that.

In our own Pacific region, New Zealand has supported civil society envoys who can engage communities most affected by day-to-day violence, and can often address highly sensitive issues in a culturally appropriate manner. The Asia-Pacific Group also offers other examples of effective engagement, tailored to local circumstances. We applaud, for example, that in Myanmar the United Nations has agreed on an action plan with State security forces. Engaging ethnic armed groups can be more challenging, but civil society there can often help secure commitments from armed groups, particularly to release child combatants.

We must also address the causes that lead children to join non-State armed groups, including socioeconomic marginalization. In situations of protracted conflict, joining armed groups can be a means of survival, or a way out of poverty. It can also confer status on self or family. To reduce the risk of rerecruitment, we need comprehensive reintegration programmes, particularly for girls, and children with disabilities. So we would encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and others to continue working on that.

It is important that we continue to improve child protection practices. We therefore propose that, in collaboration with the United Nations and other stakeholders, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General develop a working paper on engaging non-State armed groups, drawing on the best practices and innovative tools available, some of which have already been identified in the statements made today. That paper could form a basis from which we can work to develop durable solutions to better protect children in armed conflict, giving real meaning and purpose to the present debate, and giving real meaning to the phrase "children, not soldiers".

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Mr. President, allow me to commend you for holding this timely open debate on the critical issue of children in armed

conflict, with particular emphasis on child victims of non-State armed groups.

We welcome and thank the Secretary-General for his remarks, and we equally thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Yoka Brandt; the Child Protection Advisor of Save the Children, Ms. Julie Bodin; and Mr. Junior Nzita Nsuami, ex-soldier. We thank him in particular for coming and sharing his experience, one lived under very difficult circumstances, with the Council. It is important that he is here and that he speak directly to the international community.

Current armed conflicts have an undue impact on children. Indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians and terrorist tactics have troublesome consequences on children, as stated in the latest special report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339). In Syria, for instance, the hostilities have led to widespread abuses against children. In the Central African Republic, the recruitment and use of children has become endemic. The resumption of the conflict in South Sudan has led to egregious violations of children's rights. Those are just a few examples of the troublesome realities of the past year.

The challenging character and tactics used in armed conflict pose even more serious threats to children. The deliberate targeting and military use of schools, the indoctrination of children to commit despicable crimes, their use to carry explosive devices and their abduction, sexual abuse, forced recruitment, murder, rape, killing and deliberate maiming are examples of violence and abuse committed by extremist groups against children such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and others.

This open debate marks the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which was launched by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougi and UNICEF, which is finding success in mobilizing high-level political commitment in support of its objective to end the recruitment and use of children by Government security forces by 2016. However, the vast majority of parties listed in the most recent annual report (S/2014/339) are non-State armed groups operating in 15 areas, which highlights the timeliness of our debate this morning. In fact, the recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups continues to be a serious violation of international and human rights law and entails long-term consequences for children exposed to huge violence. Its persistence is a stark reminder that the progress achieved thus far should be measured not only by improvements in the normative framework, but also in the way that the international community and the Security Council in particular implement decisions in specific contexts.

The United Nations endorses efforts to identify concrete commitments that translate into action and measures to engage with armed groups in order to attain action plans to put an end to the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.

At this point, we would like to share the experience of Angola in relation to this issue in the aftermath of the painful civil strife endured by my country for many years, which had visible repercussions for the Angolan population and children in particular. According to a World Bank report, Angola's demobilization process was one of the most extensive in the history of the United Nations, and the United Nations was instrumental in the formulation and implementation of that programme. It was perhaps the first time that the issue of child soldiers was specifically included in the provisions of a peace process. The children's demobilization and integration was declared a priority in the first resolution adopted by the commission set up to implement the peace agreement. A comprehensive prevention, demobilization and reintegration programme was developed, taking into account the specific needs and rights of children, including girls and the disabled, and based on emphasizing three main pillars: family reunification, psychological support and education and economic opportunity, including family livelihood needs.

The legal framework adopted in that context recognized the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and providing for the minimum age for military service, which was set at the age of 18. As a measure to prevent re-recruitment, all underage soldiers were granted an availability status that guarantees their full exemption from future military service. It was based on our experience that we supported the incorporation, in the peacekeeping and peacebuilding process, of specific commitments related to child protection by providing opportunities for the rapid release of children from armed forces and non-State armed groups and their social reintegration.

The year 2014 was marked by the high-profile mass abductions of children perpetrated by several terrorist groups, including the 14 April abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Nigeria by Boko Haram, the abduction of 153 Kurdish boys in Syria and the abduction of hundreds of Yazidi children in western Iraq, both by ISIS. We strongly condemn the mass abduction of children by non-State armed groups and terrorists, including Boko Haram, ISIS and groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic and Yemen, among others. We call for the immediate release of all abducted children.

We call for an expansion of the listing criteria laid out in resolution 1612 (2005) to include abduction as an additional cause to be covered by the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanisms on children in armed conflict, thus ensuring that the responsible parties are identified and held accountable. We recognize that United Nations peace operations play a vital role in the protection of children and should require adequate training for the fulfilment of such a critical duty. Peacekeeping operations should establish a mandatory predeployment requirement for children protection training for all troop-contributing countries in order to make a crucial difference in the way they address the challenges posed by the protection of children.

In order to protect children from armed groups, it is critically important that armed groups be impeded from acquiring arms and weapons. The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons resulting in the killing, injury and maiming of children should be taken into account. The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by the General Assembly in April 2013, is an important instrument for arms control. It stipulates that exporting State parties shall take into account the risk of trafficked weapons that can be used in acts of violence against children. We therefore encourage Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to adopt and implement legal measures to prohibit and criminalize the use and recruitment of children under the age of 18.

To conclude, with the impending tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) and of the various relevant commitments, principles and guidelines on children associated with armed conflict and armed groups and on their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, we hope that more States will support the various commitments and principles and that more resources will be allocated by the international community and concerned States to ensure that such victimized children are reintegrated into their communities.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): My delegation commends you, Mr. President, for convening this very important debate, which focuses on children as victims of non-State armed groups. We commend the Secretary-General also for his remarks and thank him for his unceasing efforts to ensure that children are given protection in situations of armed conflict. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her commitment to this cause. She was recently in Nigeria, where she engaged in discussions at very high levels with Government officials, both at the federal and state levels. The suggestions and advice she gave were taken into consideration very carefully and are being factored into Government policy, activities and actions.

We listened very carefully to our briefers, namely, Ms. Yoka Brandt from UNICEF, Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita, whom we thank for their very constructive marks, particularly with regard to the impact on the psychology and physical trauma caused by the hardship experienced by abducted children.

We also listened very carefully to the statements of other representatives who have spoken before us. We thank them for the concern they have shown with respect to the plight of children in conflict areas in north-eastern Nigeria.

We associate ourselves in advance with the statement to be delivered on beheaf fo the African Union.

As the President of the Council has noted — and as others have also said — the protection of children is a core human rights issue. We also believe that holding perpetrators of crimes and violations of the rights of children responsible, wherever they may, be is an obligation incumbent upon States Members of the United Nations.

Conflict situations put children at great risk, especially when non-State armed groups are involved. Children risk getting abducted, maimed and even killed, and are vulnerable in other ways as well. They face sexual abuse, recruitment as soldiers, trafficking,

slavery and other atrocities committed by armed groups. This situation underscores the need for States, the United Nations, regional organizations and other stakeholders to take urgent measures to enhance the protection of children in conflict zones.

It is a sad fact that armed non-State actors are active in many parts of the world today. They can be found operating in the Sahel region, the Middle East, the Great Lakes region, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa and, regrettably, in my own country, Nigeria. It is also becoming increasingly clear that they are responsible for grave violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. Their activities show that they indeed pose a serious threat to the well-being of children.

Nigeria condemns in the strongest terms possible the mass abductions of children by non-State armed groups, including those carried by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted children. We demand that parties to armed conflicts immediately cease unlawful attacks and threats of attacks against schools, students and teachers. They must also refrain from actions that impede children's access to education, including the military use of schools in clear contravention of applicable international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. For our part, we have launched a safe schools initiative that aims to provide a safe and secure learning environment for children all over Nigeria.

As we have heard this morning, regional and subregional organizations have an important role to play in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In that regard, we welcome the growing cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union. This important partnership is anchored in the September 2013 agreement between both institutions aimed at taking measures to protect African children from the impact of armed conflict. Nigeria urges both institutions to continue to strengthen their win-win collaboration on this important issue.

At the subregional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has shown a strong commitment to promoting the well-being of children affected by conflict through its Accra Declaration on War-affected Children in West Africa, which was adopted as far back as April 2000. The Declaration commits ECOWAS member States to taking a broad range of measures to protect and rehabilitate war-affected children. In order to live up to their commitments under the Declaration, ECOWAS member States must continue to enhance their domestic competencies and capabilities in order to respond effectively in a multidisciplinary way to the varying needs and vulnerabilities of children in conflict situations.

Nigeria is firmly committed to meeting its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. These instruments have been incorporated into our laws at both the national and state levels. They contain extensive provisions against abusive practices against children, and we are determined to enforce them.

We are aware of allegations made by certain entities about the purported enlistment and encouragement of children and young persons by Nigerian authorities to serve in neighbourhood watch groups, popularly referred to as civilian joint task forces. We wish to take this opportunity to assure the Security Council and the entire international community that the Nigerian military remains a professional force that is conscious of its domestic and international obligations. There has never been an attempt to recruit underage children nor use them in any other capacity in the prosecution of the current war against Boko Haram. The neighbourhood watch groups were created by youth in different communities across north-eastern Nigeria to defend themselves and their neighbourhoods against the deadly attacks of Boko Haram. We would like to make it clear that membership in these groups is voluntary and without any form of assistance, inducement or coercion by the Nigerian military or security forces.

Finally, Nigeria believes that the Council should continue to pay attention to the issue of children and armed conflict. It is a growing problem that requires a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders — States, international organizations, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations — in order for it to be addressed effectively. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the protection of the rights of children in conflict situations. We are taking all the necessary measures to meet the threat caused by Boko Haram to the welfare of children. Together with our neighbours and international partners, we are winning the war against

the terrorists and we are resolutely determined to bring those captured alive to justice.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the French initiative to hold today's open debate. I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, for their briefings. China has also listened attentively to the statements made by representatives of the non-governmental organizations.

Children represent the future of humankind. They are the hope of human progress and development. In recent years, the international community has made positive headway in protecting children in armed conflict, but, at the same time, horrendously evil acts of killing, abducting and using children as human bombs by terrorist and extremist forces still occur from time to time in certain conflict areas, which has inflicted physical and psychological harm on a large number of innocent children. We are highly concerned about this situation.

China supports the international community in increasing its attention to the issue of the protection of children in armed conflict and in taking further specific measures in response. I would like to stress the following four points.

First, the protection of children in armed conflict starts with halting and easing armed conflicts. Only by preventing the worsening of security situations can we fundamentally attack the causes of children being harmed in armed conflict. China supports the Council in its efforts to assume, in accordance with the responsibilities endowed upon it by the Charter of the United Nations, a greater role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding, among others, and in providing a firm guarantee for the protection of children in armed conflict. The Council should, in that connection make greater use of the means of negotiation and mediation provided under Chapter VI of the Charter in an effort to defuse disputes peacefully and prevent the further escalation of conflicts so as to create favourable conditions for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Secondly, the Government of the country in conflict bears the primary responsibility for the further protection of children in armed conflict. The sovereignty of the country in conflict should be respected. In executing Council resolutions and effectively implementing the various programmes, plans and initiatives for the protection of children, the role of the Government in question is irreplaceable. The international community should make full use of the leading role of the particular Government, attend to and support that Government's efforts, and mobilize the international community to assist the Government in overcoming financial and other difficulties and in strengthening its capacity-building.

Thirdly, the international community should urge any party to conflict to observe the relevant international law and obligations and stop acts of violence against children. The Council should not condone acts by terrorists and extremists forces and other armed groups, including the killing of children, the use of children as human bombs and the compulsion of children to kill hostages. We should adopt a zero-tolerance policy and measures that form a deterrence against the armed groups in question in order to create a peaceful and safe environment for the protection of children.

Fourthly, all United Nations bodies should leverage their respective strengths and advantages and act in synergy to protect children in armed conflict. United Nations peacekeeping operations should comprehensively fulfil their mandates and strengthen their protection of children. Related agencies and institutions, such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, should engage in close cooperation, join forces to support the countries in conflict to launch their peacebuilding efforts, promote the socioeconomic development of the countries, safeguard children's physical and psychological health and ensure their rights and opportunities for equal access to education. The international community should also aid children in returning to their homes, societies and schools as a priority incorporated into post-conflict peacebuilding strategies in order to help children in armed conflict to resume normal lives.

The protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, from being harmed by armed conflict is the shared responsibility of the international community. The key lies in resolving conflicts and achieving development. The international community should provide countries affected by conflicts with financial and technical assistance, and aid them in economic development and in improving their people's livelihoods, thereby lifting them out of poverty as soon as possible

and removing the root causes of conflict. China is ready to join the parties concerned in a concerted effort to step up cooperation and effectively improve the situation of children and other vulnerable groups in armed conflict so that they can stay safely away from the scourge of war and the problems resulting from displacement and homelessness and soon lead peaceful, stable and happy lives.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): I would like to thank you, Sir, for holding this debate. I also wish to extend my appreciation to the briefers today for their stark presentations. Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union later today.

More than a year ago, 59 students were shot and burned to death at a boarding school in Buni Yadi and more than 270 girls were abducted in Chibok by Boko Haram in Nigeria. As others have noted, abductions have continued as recently as yesterday. There were 150 Kurdish boys kidnapped by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on their way home from school. Another 132 children were killed in a Taliban attack in Peshawar, and forced conversions; public executions and killings; mutilations; forced marriages; rape and sexual slavery, including that of children, have occurred in areas under murderous Daesh control. Girls as young as eight to ten years old have been used as suicide bombers by Boko Haram. In the past three months, Daesh recruited at least 400 Syrian children — children who have already suffered unspeakable hardships and horrors as cubs of the caliphate for military training and hard-line indoctrination. Even in the middle of Europe, the phenomenon of child soldiers seems to be surfacing under the lawless rule of the illegal militants ravaging the eastern parts of Ukraine, where underage soldiers were reported present among the militants, being used, inter alia, to train other recruits.

All in all, around the world, some 300,000 child soldiers are being deprived of everything that childhood is supposed to be, mostly by non-State actors. Therefore, in that light, today's focus on children who are victims of non-State actors could not be more pertinent. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Protocols additional to the Geneva Convention oblige non-State armed groups not to use children under any circumstances. The past year saw the launch of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign.

At the national level, the Democratic Republic of the Congo released some 4,000 children from the armed forces, and groups have made progress in the implementation of its action plan. Somalia created a mechanism for the handover of former child soldiers to the United Nations and established a child protection unit. Progress in Chad enabled its armed forces to be delisted from the annex of the Secretary-General's report. Yemen signed an action plan pledging to put an end to the widespread recruitment of children by armed forces and non-State groups. Today, however, as the country balances on the brink, there are various groups and particularly the Houthis that are violating the commitments undertaken in the signing of the plan. On the other hand, UNICEF secured the release of approximately 3,000 children from the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army's Cobra faction. In the Central African Republic, more than 100 children associated with anti-Balaka were released in the past summer. The numbers of children who are forced to carry arms, however, is much higher than those of the children released. To date, merely 12 out of the 51 annexed armed groups have signed action plans. Just one action plan has been signed since 2009, and that is not enough.

As the UNICEF representative said, the release of children is only the first step to ensure that affected children can overcome, despite the risk of re-recruitment, the horrific physical and psychological traumas that they have experienced. They need to be provided with all the necessary care, including psychological and medical help. The lack of financial resources and the stigmatization of the former child soldiers threaten the sustainable reintegration of those children and jeopardize their future. Governments and financial partners must ensure adequate resources for comprehensive reintegration programmes with a specific focus on child soldiers, including the girls among them. There is also a need to build community and family support capacity and education and skills-development opportunities, without which those children will not be able to regain their lives. The uncontrolled flows of small arms and light weapons play into the hands of those who abuse children and use them as combatants. All efforts aimed at countering child recruitment and violence against children must be undertaken in conjunction with the initiatives aimed at countering the illicit flows of small arms and their misuse.

The Council has a whole range of tools at its disposal to tackle violence against children in conflict. One such tool is sanctions designations. Child recruitment

and violence against children must become routine sanctions designation criteria. All grave violent crimes against children should be used to trigger designations and listings. The abduction of children should be included as an additional trigger for the monitoring and reporting mechanisms and for the listings.

Other tools at our disposal include regular interaction between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, whose work we appreciate very much; the relevant sanctions committees and their panels of experts; stronger engagement between the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the International Criminal Court, fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry; and the continued focus in the Secretary-General's country reports on attacks on and the military use of schools.

Further pursuit of relevant action plans is also needed, including with non-State actors. Flexibility and openness are required in handling the complex issue of contacts with these groups; otherwise, the sad state of affairs will not change. We urge relevant Governments to facilitate access to and engagement with non-State actors operating on their territories by the United Nations and other international, regional and non-governmental organizations.

Another key aspect is the pursuit of accountability, both as a response to the crimes committed and as a deterrent. Much remains to be done on this, including by strengthening national capacities of the judicial sector and acting more systematically within the framework of international justice, including by referring perpetrators to the International Criminal Court (ICC); but also, importantly, creating the political will to pursue justice against those who commit crimes against children. To date, however, we have seen only one verdict for the recruitment and use of children — the Thomas Lubanga case at the ICC. The recent appearance before the ICC of Dominic Ongwen, a former child soldier and a commander of the Lord's Resistance Army, is another welcome step. While we welcome these two developments, such successes and cases are too few and far between.

As terrorists increasingly use children and adolescents both as targets of recruitment and brainwashing and as perpetrators, coherent and pro-active efforts are needed to inform vulnerable communities on how to best protect their children under given circumstances. Developing effective counter-narratives, exposing the terrorist criminals for what they really are, and cutting through the slick media and online recruitment campaigns are required.

To conclude, it is our collective responsibility to stem violence against children, including by non-State actors, by resolute and targeted action. We call on all States to redouble their efforts to that end.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for having organized this important debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General; Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; Ms. July Bodin, Child Protection Advisor, Save the Children; and Mr. Junior Nzita, President of Paix pour l'enfance, for their informative briefings and their commitment to protecting children.

Chad also associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Observer of the African Union.

Today's debate is an important step in focusing our attention on the situation of child victims of non-State armed groups as we approach the commemoration later this year the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005). The scale of the violence itself and the emergence of new terrorist groups that use shocking and brutal methods against children compel the international community to adapt its approach to and tools for protection to meet these new types of challenges.

The abduction in 2014 of 270 high school girls from Chibok by Boko Haram, 153 Kurdish boys from Ain al-Arab in Syria and hundreds of Yazidi children in Iraq by the Islamic State underscore the abhorrent use of children by terrorists as tools to achieve their ends. The use of children to carry bombs in attacks or as fighters among the ranks of terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Lord's Resistance Army, and terrorist attacks against schools, such as that of 16 December 2014 against a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, where 132 children were killed, highlights the importance of debates such as that of today and the urgency of finding ways to deal with such acts. Of the 59 entities listed in the annex of the 2014 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339), 51 are non-State actors, including repeat offenders. This shows the immensity of the efforts that remain necessary to cut down and

eradicate violence committed against children by these groups.

While the judgments handed down by the international courts — against Charles Taylor in 2009 as principal leader of the United Revolutionary Front of Sierra Leone and recently against Thomas Lubanga by the International Criminal Court — are evidence of the fight against impunity for violence against children, they have far from deterred non-State groups, in particular, terrorist groups. As a result, complementary efforts aiming to seek ways and means to prevent and respond to violations against children by armed groups also requires us to consider the question of access to such groups and dialogue with them. While such access is made impossible in many cases due to security and political reasons, we receive reports of new recruitment, including the abduction and use of children on a daily basis. In this context, we must consider how to protect children under all circumstances and the difficulty of establishing dialogue with armed groups. We wonder whether turning to certain non-governmental organizations that have the ability to access some armed groups due to their neutrality could not be used to facilitate, in some cases, negotiations of action plans with such groups.

According to the report of the Secretary-General, and as Ms. Leila Zerrougui recalled in her statement, there armed groups that honour their commitments, and with which the United Nations is in dialogue through various strategies adapted to their characteristics and diversity. Moreover, there is an important need to raise awareness among communities that can at times be complicit in the recruitment of children or which have links with armed groups.

Faced with the scale of the violence committed against children, the international community thankfully remains mobilized, as evidenced by the ratification by States of the Geneva Conventions, human rights conventions and instruments, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol. These Paris commitments and the principle of return relating to children linked to armed forces and groups also enjoy broad international consensus.

My country Chad, for its part, has ratified the majority of these international instruments and adhered to the Paris principle of return. In September 2014, we signed a protocol of agreement with the United Nations relating to the transfer of children linked to armed forces and groups, which allowed for the liberation of children linked to such groups from a neighboring country, the Central African Republic. Furthermore, following the for the subregional forum, held in N'Djamena in June 2010, on the recruitment and use of children, the Lake Chad Basin States, the Sudan and the Central African Republic signed a declaration committing them to facilitating access for humanitarian protection organizations to children for so as to carry out their identification and return without conditions. This reflects the importance of subregional and regional cooperation and highlights the need to promote international cooperation in general when it comes to protecting children. In this context, we call on the States which have not yet done so to adhere to or implement the various international conventions and instruments as well as the Paris principle, and to join in regional or subregional efforts to level to stop violence committed against children by armed groups.

In addition, as we await the commemorative events around the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), we agree that abduction should be among the criteria for listing armed groups in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual reports. In order to improve the international community's efforts to combat violence against children, we believe it is important to consider, among other measures and actions, increasing judicial agreements between States;strengthening communication between the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and some of the sanctions committees and non-governmental organizations, and broadening its purview; getting national legislatures to adopt and include guidelines for protecting schools and universities against attacks; and including the issue of children and armed conflict in United Nations political and peacekeeping mandates.

In conclusion, we say that children embody humankind's future, and therefore that protecting them should be the absolute highest priority of the entire international community, which should mobilize every possible means to ensure that is achieved.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important debate on the child victims of non-State armed groups. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, and all the briefers for their thought-provoking and bald statements. I welcome the fact that the Council has heard from a wide range of voices today to help inform our discussion, including

from a former child soldier and the community of non-governmental organizations.

Since we last met to discuss this issue (see S/PV.7259), a number of high-profile and abhorrent abuses have been committed against children by non-State armed groups. In Nigeria, Boko Haram sent three young girls to their deaths in suicide bombings. In Syria, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant filmed children taking part in arbitrary executions of prisoners, and in Pakistan in December 132 children were brutally murdered in their school by the Taliban. Those are just three of many recent examples. It is such shocking acts of violence that illustrate the scale of the challenge that faces us and show that we must redouble our efforts to prevent them happening in future. Today I will focus on three ways of doing so — by ensuring accountability, fostering reintegration and promoting action plans and inclusive peace processes.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) plays an invaluable role in the fight against impunity. The Court's conviction and sentencing of Thomas Lubanga for recruiting and using child soldiers in conflict sent a very clear message that perpetrators will be held accountable even if many years have elapsed since they committed their crimes. Action through the ICC has not always been possible. Despite reports of the deaths of more than 11,000 children in Syria, last year the Council failed to agree on a draft resolution referring the situation there to the ICC (S/2014/348). But that has not deterred us from other efforts to document human-rights violations committed by States and human-rights abuses by non-State actors, in readiness for a time when perpetrators can be held to account. The Security Council, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and civil society must therefore use all the tools available to ensure accountability for violations and abuses committed against children. The expansion of the listing criteria for resolution 1612 (2005) to include abductions is another step that will enhance the international community's ability to hold perpetrators to account, and more action plans with non-State actors will give the United Nations valuable metrics for measuring whether progress is being made.

We welcome the release this week of as many as 250 child soldiers by the Cobra Faction in South Sudan. We commend the efforts of UNICEF to secure their freedom and call for the release of the remaining 3,000 child soldiers in the Cobra Faction over the coming days. But we must recognize that their release is only the first step. The trauma for those children is far from over, as Mr. Nzita told us this morning. Children formerly associated with armed groups are often marginalized by their communities, making reintegration more difficult. Moreover, without successful rehabilitation and reintegration, children are left vulnerable to re-recruitment. In that context, we must also ensure that children associated with armed groups are not arbitrarily detained and have access to rehabilitation and long-term stability following their release. I emphasize the importance of the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups in ensuring that children are treated as victims, not perpetrators.

While the picture may often seem bleak, many non-State actors have shown some willingness and commitment to working with the United Nations to end violations and abuses committed against children by entering into action plans and committing to protecting children in peace processes. More than half of the action plans signed by the United Nations, and half of those that have been successfully implemented, have been with non-State actors. We urge all listed non-State armed groups to agree on concrete, time-bound action plans designed to end violations committed against children and secure their release. As seen in the Philippines, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, non-State actors' involvement in peace processes can also provide the momentum for ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We support the integration of child-protection provisions, including children's release and reintegration, into all peace and ceasefire agreements.

There are clear steps for non-State actors and the international community to take in order to stop the exploitation of children in armed conflict, but in doing so we must not lose sight of the role that States themselves play in enabling and even supporting the growth of violent non-State actors. The breakdown of good governance, the abuse of the rule of law and the denial of basic security allow such groups to flourish, leaving some 15 million children living in countries embroiled in major conflicts. Whether such violence occurs in Syria, Yemen or eastern Ukraine, the Council must do its utmost to end it, to protect children and to give a strong voice to those who are most vulnerable.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting. Our thanks also go to the Secretary-

General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, as well as to Ms. Yoka Brandt, Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita.

I would like to emphasize the importance of today's debate on children who are victims of non-State armed groups and their fate in times of conflict. A lot of progress has been made in improving the criteria and legal frameworks for protecting children in armed conflict, and in the international community's efforts to protect them during and after such conflict. Despite such improvements, however, we are still seeing an unprecedented increase in violations and in the number of child victims around the world, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. The exploitation of children by non-State armed groups has reached dangerous levels, particularly owing to the increasingly modern methods used to recruit them and to how easy it is manipulate them, particularly owing to children's ignorance about the dangers they are facing.

Many extremist groups have committed horrendous crimes and violations against children, exposing them to scenes of violence and encouraging them to participate and make such crimes their own. Girls and boys are forced to work as combattants, suicide bombers or even executioners. They are reduced to sexual slavery or to working as miners. They may even be paid after their abduction — $1,200 a month in some conflict regions. Daesh recently opened special centres to recruit children in an organized and systematic manner so as to entrench its ideology and extremist ideas in the heads of these children. The main danger posed by terrorist groups like Daesh is that they are training a generation to champion their extremist ideology, which will complicate the eradication of such thinking in the future.

Among the methods used by extremist non-State actors to recruit children is the dissemination of social media on the Internet in order to mobilize them intellectually to join these groups throughout the world, and not just in conflict zones, either by interacting with them directly on certain websites or by other means. It is important to encourage those sites to find effective ways to counter terrorist propaganda and advertising, and to establish guidelines to identify content that can be published on social media pages so that they cannot be used as forums for the recruitment of children.

One of the most pressing challenges facing the international community today is how to constrain non-State groups to respect international humanitarian law and inalienable right, and to impose on them a sense of responsibility for fighting the impunity of those who use abuse children's rights. There is no magic wand that we can wave, I know, but we have to establish a mechanism and preventive strategies to address these challenges. That will require greater cooperation between the Security Council and the rest of the United Nations in using the means at our disposal to prevent conflicts more effectively, including through early warning mechanisms and preventive diplomacy. Pressure must be brought to bear on parties to conflict to sign on to plans of action for the protection of children and commit themselves to such programmes.

The United Nations entities need access to such pockets of conflict so as to provide necessary support to children and stop them from joining armed groups in order to earn money to support themselves. We must also focus our efforts on educational and reinsertion programmes for children who have already been recruited, which will help build a foundation for the protection of children in armed conflict. It is essential to launch awareness-raising campaigns to inform children of the dangers of joining armed groups in conflict areas, and to create special commissions to identify violations committed against children by non-State armed groups in order to ensure that their instigators are brought to justice. The names of these criminals, particularly those who perpetrate sexual violence and mass abductions of girls, should be included in sanctions lists.

Jordan is working to provide children in Syria with a better future and to prevent them from participating in the ongoing conflict. We are giving them educational and health-care services of the highest quality, to the fullest extent of our capacities. International organizations have supported Jordan in the provision of such services, including through coordination with the United Nations specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations. With the help of UNICEF, a care centre has been established for refugee children that offers an educational and preventive framework, in addition to psychological and social support. Jordan has opened public and private schools to Syrian refugee children. The number of school-age children in and outside the camps now exceeds 120,000, yet despite such efforts it has been recognized that the current funding of programmes targeting children in armed conflict is neither sustainable nor sufficient. The international community must work in earnest to find adequate funding to fill the gap so as to guarantee the provision of such services.

Finally, we are forced to ask: How many violations of children's rights will have to be committed, and how many children will have to endure the most odious abuse before everyone signs the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and before States can find the common resolve to fight the recruitment of children in armed conflict?

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to thank the delegation of France for its initiative in convening today's meeting. We also thank the Secretary-General and the invited briefers for their dedication to preventing and addressing the violation of children's right in armed conflict and for the valuable information they have presented today. We especially thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her dedication and active work in assisting children throughout the world.

We share the concern that has been expressed over the difficult situation of millions of children affected by armed conflict. A year ago, Ms. Zerrougui, together with Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF, launched the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to end the recruitment and use of children in national security forces by 2016. We can now note with satisfaction that the initiative has been successful. With respect to the activities of non-State armed groups, however, the severity of the problem has not abated. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339), out of the 59 parties listed 51 are non-State actors.

Today, the danger posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and other terrorist groups has become a priority. Information is being spread on the Internet and social networks to hypnotize children and adolscents under religious pretexts and to recruit them for participation in military action or as terrorist suicide bombers. Not so long ago, media worldwide broadcast barbaric images from an ISIS video in which a 12-year old boy shot a prisoner. We continue to receive shocking information on the abduction of children in Nigeria by Boko Haram. These are just the most grievous of recent crimes committed against children.

Fighting crimes against children is an important component of the range of measures adopted for the settlement of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction. It is clear that thorough and consistent efforts are needed to reintegrate children formerly associated with armed groups and to treat the psychological, socioeconomic and other impacts on child victims of violence. Most States affected by armed conflict are striving to improve the situation of children, but they often require the assistance of the international community. The United Nations main task in that regard is to complement and support national efforts. The Security Council and its mechanisms can work most effectively in cooperation with the States where armed groups are active. The role of Governments, alongside United Nations structures, in cooperating on child protection with non-State armed groups is clearly articulated in resolution 1612 (2005).

We believe that, in carrying out the complex mission assigned to her under her mandate, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General can find the best way to help children in each specific case. The ways of exerting pressure on violators can vary given the differences in the nature, goals and strategies of armed groups. We believe that the Council, including its thematic working group, has the necessary tools under the Council's resolutions in order to find the most effective ways to solve problems pertaining to grave violations against children in armed conflict. Moreover, those mechanisms must deal first and foremost with the largest and most acute situations of armed conflict on the Council's agenda that lead to serious violations against children.

We decisively condemn violations of the norms of international law, international humanitarian law and international law relating to human rights and the rights of refugees with regard to children, regardless of who commits them. Following the requisite investigations, parties guilty of committing such crimes must be brought to justice. Both premeditated attacks and the indiscriminate or excessive use of force, which have comparable effects, are unacceptable.

This year we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We wish success to the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, the group's new Chair, in particular on the Council meeting on this issue to be held in June. Today's meeting can make a contribution to the preparations for the upcoming meeting, as well as to future meetings of the Working Group. In that regard, we note the intention of the French delegation to prepare a relevant non-paper in its national capacity. In accordance with the Council's past practice, we do not view that document as expressing the views of

the members of the Council or as an outcome of the meeting.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General, his Special Representative Laila Zerrougi, Deputy Director Brandt, Ms. Bodin and Mr. Nzita for sharing their insights today and for the work they are doing to safeguard the world's children.

In this Chamber we make choices about international responses to conflict through our resolutions, the work of our peacekeepers, the weight of our sanctions and, sometimes, tragically, through our inaction. We have a duty to make choices so that children do not fact impossible ones. We have seen many worthy efforts to protect children, but we would not be doing our jobs if we did not use our time here today to focus on what we can do better.

States Members of the United Nations must be held to the highest standards. At an absolute minimum, we must ensure that national armed forces do not unlawfully recruit and use children. To that end, we applaud the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, but recognize that this is a collective responsibility and a challenge that can be addressed only through difficult choices being made in capitals to take a stand against abusers.

The United States is doing its part. In 2008, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act was signed into law in the United States. That law requires the publication of an annual list of countries whose countries unlawfully recruit and use child soldiers, or Governments that support armed groups that do so. The law goes further than publicly naming those countries; countries on the list can also be subject to certain restrictions on assistance provided by the United States Governments. We know those tools can work. Public listings and assistance restrictions, in coordination with the concerted engagement of other Member States and international actors, are useful tools and have helped to encourage Governments to take important action.

In response to that kind of multilateral engagement, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed an action plan with the United Nations to end the unlawful use and recruitment of child soldiers within its armed forces, as well as sexual violence and other violations and abuses committed against children by the armed forces and security services. They have made significant progress towards meeting their goals, as documented in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/339). The United Nations has been given greater access to State security facilities and detention centres in order to identify and separate minors, and important new policies have been adopted.

Of course, much more remains to be done. But tools like those can be helpful, and we encourage other Member States to establish legislation and employ similar tools to press countries to take meaningful action to address the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers. We of course know that the solution to this problem is more complex than any single piece of legislation or act of bilateral pressure can solve, and the risk posed by non-State actors is great. To that end, there is more that we can do at the United Nations in the common cause for children.

First, we can insist on strong human rights reporting in peacekeeping missions, which includes accurate and timely information on violations and abuses committed against children. And then we can act on that information with all the tools we have at our disposal to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Secondly, we can ensure that child protection issues are on the table during the difficult work of negotiating peace agreements. There has never been a conflict that did not involve children. The peace that we seek should be for their benefit. Child protection is an issue around which all sides should be able to agree, even if they cannot agree on much else, and it is a choice that warring parties can affirmatively make when making peace.

Thirdly, we must be ready to receive children coming out of conflict with more robust disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. Kidnapped at the age of 10 along with four other girls by soldiers of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a Congolse told representatives of a non-governmental organization that when FDLR soldiers raped a woman in front of her, she had no choice. "I did nothing", she said, "I could not do anything to stop the rape." After seven years as s soldier, she deserted the group and ran through the forest for two days, avoiding certain execution if caught by the search party sent after her. Bilaterally and through our United Nations agencies, we must bolster the shortcomings in the DDR process so that children do not have to make the choice to continue fighting or to return to fighting

simply because they are unable to escape and they see no other path. One programme — an $8 million DDR programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, funded by the United States in cooperation with UNICEF — is working to separate and reintegrate children from armed groups into safe, secure and stable communities. More than 1,000 children have been separated from armed groups to date. There is an urgent need for more such work.

I want to raise another choice, a terrible one, confronting some children today with which we must contend. We are increasingly seeing young people go to great lengths to join organizations intent on fomenting violence and instilling terror. Children are being lured into war zones to join terrorist organizations committed to a barbaric and violent confrontation with humankind and modernity. On 17 February, three young girls boarded a flight from London to Istanbul and reportedly crossed into Syria with the goal of joining the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). A family member of one of the girls described her as "an A-star student". Her family has publicly begged her, implored her, to come home. Those girls were likely lured by ISIL's false promises of righteousness and glory, while in fact all that awaits them, and too many like them, is terror, murder and suffering. The propaganda employed by ISIL in its effort to recruit terrorists is innovative, shockingly effective and prolific — and estimated 90,000 tweets and other social media responses per day. Even as we engage ISIL on the battlefield to win, we must also contest and expose ISIL's malignant lies and its pernicious efforts to recruit and exploit young people from lands near and far.

Therefore today, when we speak of children and armed conflict we are no longer just speaking of conflict chasing after children like the young girl who mustered the courage to escape into the forests from the murderous FDLR. We are also speaking, frighteningly, of young people who leave behind their families and seek out conflict. Perhaps we can never understand what drove those three young girls to seek to join ISIL's campaign of cruelty and hate, but it merits our uninterrupted attention and unwavering resolve to stop.

Whether victimized by terrorists or exploitative Governments, or armed groups, children deserve and need our protection. From better reporting to new accountability measures established by Member States to inclusive peace negotiations and robust demobilization efforts — we must make those policy choices here and in our capitals so that our children do not have to confront impossible choices in our stead.

Junior Nzita was forced to become a soldier at the age of 12, and, as he so eloquently briefed us and wrote: "My childhood was not like other children's. It was stolen, confiscated and deprived of the love of my mother and the protection of my country". But Mr. Nzita's story is not only about loss; it is about what he has created. His organization provides support for marginalized children and helps to reintegrate them into society. Given the opportunity, he chose to make life better for others who have suffered what he has suffered. We must ensure that all children in all societies are shielded from conflict and have the opportunity to become leaders who can build strong, stable communities and carry out the important work of making peace.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the framework of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), next July, we would like to thank France for having convened this open debate. We would also highlight the leadership of Malaysia in the informal Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

We appreciate the briefings by the Secretary-General and invited participants, especially civil society and Junior Nzita. The encourage us to continue to work decisively for girls and boys in conflict and post-conflict situations. We thank the Special Representative, Leila Zerrougui, for her work in this area and her call to prevent and eradicate the brutal actions of non-State actors against children, which we strongly condemn.

My delegation endorses the statement to be made later by the Austrian delegation on behalf of the Human Security Network, to which my country belongs.

Chile, in its capacity as a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and Convention 182 of the International Labour Organization, and a signatory to the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, believes that focusing on non-State actors, as we are doing here today, should not delay the efforts being deployed through the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to prevent and eradicate the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces by 2016.

States have the primary responsibility to combat impunity and bring to justice and punish the

perpetrators of the most serious crimes committed against children. If States do not have the capacity or are unwilling to do so, it will be up to the International Criminal Court to address those crimes that are covered under the Rome Statute. The recent ruling of the Court's Appeals Chamber in the case of Thomas Lubanga, which touches on reparations and the role of the Trust Fund for Victims, is a specific example in that respect. International commissions of inquiry should also address this issue and redouble their efforts to preserve evidence of these most serious of crimes.

Chile reiterates its condemnation of the six categories of the most serious violations identified by the Council and of all of the other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflicts. We therefore condemn in the strongest of terms the abduction of girls and boys and their use as suicide bombers or sex slaves by extremist armed groups. No religion or ideology can justify these actions, which must be firmly condemned, prevented and eradicated by all actors that participate in conflicts and by the international community as a whole.

We encourage cooperation in formulating strategies aimed at preventing and eradicating violent extremism and the abduction and recruitment of children by armed groups. In this regard, we hope that the Council will soon address the issue of the abduction of girls and boys in conflict and post-conflict situations. Likewise, we vehemently condemn the use of children by non-State actors in the exploitation and trafficking of natural resources, which is used, inter alia, to acquire weapons.

Cooperation by Governments, non-governmental organizations or other parties with non-State armed groups that recruit and use children for any purpose should be punished, even when such groups do not intend to violate the rights of children. The system can play a role in this regard through the sanctions Committees and peacekeeping missions. The work of the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF, the human rights and child protection sections of those missions, and the groups of experts of the sanctions Committees is crucial to information-sharing and a full listing of non-State groups that use children and the organizations and individuals that are cooperating with these armed groups.

We hope that resolutions concerning new committees or the renewal of mandates will address this issue, and we appreciate any recommendations that the groups of experts of the sanctions Committees, among others, might make with regard to controlling small arms and light weapons.

Chile reiterates the need to promote effective and inclusive processes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration for children associated with armed forces or armed groups, with the effective participation of those affected and local communities, thereby promoting social cohesion among the traumatized social groups.

In order for resolution 2143 (2014), of which Chile was a sponsor, to be effectively implemented, we stress the importance of respecting the civilian nature of schools and condemn all attacks and threats of attacks against them, which contravene international humanitarian law and the right to education. We call on the parties to armed conflict to refrain from such actions and hope that the Secretary-General will continue to follow up and report, among other things, on the military use of schools and hospitals. In this regard, we view positively the preparation and implementation of the Lucens Guidelines, aimed at preventing the military use of schools and universities during armed conflicts. We also believe that the issue of the protection of education and educational establishments should be addressed in ceasefire agreements and post-conflict agendas.

Finally, given the transnational character of many non-State armed groups, collective action is imperative so that the multilateral system can deal effectively with the threats facing children in armed conflict. This must lead to a strengthening of cooperation and coordination among regional and sub-regional organizations, information-sharing, joint regional actions and regional policies for the prevention and protection of children, including the special needs of girls, as was highlighted during the open debate held on 30 January (see S/PV.7374).

Mr. Ramirez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's open debate on the situation of girls and boys in armed conflict, in which more than 80 countries have shown interest by asking to speak. We believe that this is very important debate. We are grateful for the participation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of

UNICEF, Ms. Julie Bodin; and Mr. Junior Nzita for their testimony and their participation in this debate.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has acceded to all United Nations conventions and protocols aimed at effectively protecting boys and girls. In that regard, our country condemns any violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law ibn the context of children in armed conflict, and we call on all parties to meet their obligations under the applicable provisions of international law. The recruitment of girls and boys, whatever its form or motivation, runs contrary to the better interests of those young people and compromises their guaranteed right to life and to development.

My country rejects all uses of children in armed conflict and other abuses and violations committed against the children thus affected. We deplore the impunity that prevails in many areas of armed conflict, where the parties persist in violating the relevant provisions of applicable international law. We firmly support the adoption of effective measures to ensure the demobilization, rehabilitation, physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child soldiers.

Venezuela considers it tragic and ethically questionable that a significant number of girls and boys in situations of armed conflict live and grow up in a culture of horror and violence. That situation affects those children's ability to build their country's future in a spirit of peace and sustainable development and compromises their future. In various reports of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, it can be seen that the situation of children affected by armed conflict throughout the world remains a source of major concern. We regret that 2014 has been the worst year for children in situations of armed conflict.

My country repudiates as robustly as possible the atrocities and abuses against and large-scale abductions of children in conflict areas perpetrated by extremist and terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram and Al-Qaida, among others. The situation is unacceptable and threatens our very humanity. The persistence of cases of forced recruitment or mass abductions by non-State actors, with a view to compelling children to participate in fighting or support work for armed conflict, is an ongoing reality. Nevertheless, in a significant number of cases, children join in the armed conflict because they are forced to do so as the only option, given their socioeconomically vulnerable situation and the abuse, discrimination and exclusion they face as a consequence of war.

We believe it imperative to move beyond the exclusively punitive approach in order to address the problem comprehensively by dealing with the root causes of conflict. Preventing the use of children in armed conflict and guaranteeing their protection and rights in such situations with a view to reintegration will be achieved only through adequate social, political and economic conditions.

When we privilege the military option and invoke national interests to carry out military interventions or deal with conflict situations, thereby promoting the proliferation of non-State armed groups, extremists and terrorists, we create conditions conducive to the abuse and violation of the human rights of girls and boys. The funding and permanent flow of arms to such groups must cease. The use of double standards in dealing with those issues undermines international efforts to protect children in armed conflict.

My country supports accountability for violations against children in armed conflicts. No one can, whether non-State armed groups or State military forces, is exempt. In that regard, we cannot fail to mention the situation in the Palestinian occupied territory, where more than 300 children remain detained without being accorded minor status, and are subjected to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment by Israel.

We consider it appropriate that in all peace processes, ceasefires and implementing mechanisms, the parties and mediators include the issue of child protection as a required condition and principle. Child protection must be an integral element of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, with the necessary resources and appropriate training prior to deployment.

Measures to encourage non-State actors to undertake commitments to protecting children in armed conflict should be adapted on a case-by-case basis. We should remember that national Governments are primarily responsible for protecting children within their territory. That is why the United Nations and regional organizations must work with the States concerned and in close cooperation with the respective authorities.

Finally, Venezuela calls upon those States that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of

the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to accede to those legal instruments.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to all briefers for their presentations, which were sterling. However I expressing thanks not only for the presentations, but also for the splendid efforts carried out each day in defense of our children, who represent our future.

I do not think it is going too far to say that before 1999 the Council had forgotten, or at least not focused enough attention on the issue of children, because the first relevant Council resolutions post-date that year. It was about the year 1996 when we saw two truly important milestones in the General Assembly: first, the creation of the Office now ably led by Ms. Zerrougui, and then the issuamce of the splendid Graça Machel report (A/51/306), which awakened our consciences.

Since then, progress has been made in a number of areas, five of which I will address. First, the Security Council has adopted six resolutions addressing in monographic fashion the serious issue of children and armed conflict. I believe that the Council must insist on their full respect and implementation.

Secondly, we have been able to identify six serious violations of those rights and four triggers. In that context, I express my unqualified support for the Malaysian proposal that abductions be identified as triggers.

My third point concerns the language of the mandates of peacekeeping operations. In my delegation's view, the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the mandate that best reflects the problem of children in armed conflict. In that context, I wish to make three specific proposals: first, that the Council ensure that all peacekeeping operations are provided with adequate language on the protection of children in armed conflict; secondly, that an effort be made to ensure that in peacekeeping operations the Council has included special advisers on children's issues; and thirdly, that we ensure optimal training of our Blue Helmets in those issues.

The fourth area of progress relates to the funds and programmes, which I believe to have accomplished extraordinary work. I would highlight the work of UNICEF as a very specific case in South Sudan, in the Bentiu area, where, in a very short time they have been able to ensure education accessibility for 11,000 children, largely due to the efforts of UNICEF and its donors.

Fifthly, I highlight the recognition of two delegations — that of Luxembourg, for its fantastic "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and, of course, that of Malaysia, for chairing the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

What is the current immediate challenge? In the very short term, I would propose that it should be zero tolerance. In other words, we must prevent non-State actors from using children in armed conflict. In that regard there has been much success in terms of national armies, but progress is necessary in terms of non-State actors. Spain therefore enthusiastically supports the ability to access non-State actors in order to discuss that very serious issue with them.

Finally, what tools are available to ensure success in the face of this difficult challenge? I would quote three in particular.

The first is public opinion. A few days ago I read about a 15-year old child, Walid, who was not being covered by the media. He was saying proudly how at 15 he had a machine gun and he controlled a border post in Yemen. Nobody paid attention to that. What we should be doing is looking at social networks. Social networks should be used to condemn cases of this kind so that they are not forgotten.

The second is dialogue and action plans. As several delegations have said, 23 plans of action have been signed, 12 with non-State actors and 11 with States. We need to further work on those plans and, if necessary, sign new ones, as was mentioned by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, with non-State actors that have not yet signed up.

Thirdly, we need to promote interaction between the International Criminal Court and the Security Council. I think it is good to remember that article 8 of the Rome Statute establishes very clearly that it is a crime to recruit children for armed conflict. I would like to make a very specific proposal to promote interaction between the International Criminal Court and the Security Council, in particular with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Finally, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. I am convinced

that you, Sir, have been inspired by Victor Hugo's celebrated hero, the young Gavroche, whom Mario Vargas Llosa described as the most fascinating writer of world literature. Today France has taken another step in the right direction.

The President (*spoke in French*): I would like to remind speakers to kindly limit their statements to four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpreters are able to work properly. I wish to inform all concerned that we will be continuing this open debate right through the lunch hour, given the very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on a very important issue.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, as well as Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt, Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita for their enlightening briefings.

Deliberate abuses committed against boys and girls in the context of armed conflicts have been under discussion by the Security Council for 16 years now. Over the years we have developed an increasingly effective framework to tackle the issue. Yet the situation has recently been exacerbated by the rise of extremist non-State armed groups with little regard for international humanitarian and human rights law. Some of those movements have reportedly engaged in raping, abducting, recruiting, maiming or murdering girls and boys, while denying them their basic rights and needs, including the right to education. Brazil strongly condemns those violations and expects that those responsible will be brought to justice.

The international community must join forces in tackling these challenges with the utmost seriousness. Brazil has endorsed the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. During its most recent mandates as a member of the Security Council, Brazil supported the adoption of milestone documents on the matter, including resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1998 (2011). Likewise, Brazil fully supports the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to end the recruitment of children by Government forces by 2016.

While acknowledging the magnitude of the atrocities committed by certain non-State actors, we should keep in mind that abuses against boys and girls also result from unilateral Governmental military intervention and illegal occupation. Let us also not forget that the protection of children in armed conflicts is closely linked to the promotion of development. While social inequality impacts all groups, children are particularly vulnerable to its negative consequences. According to UNICEF, the poorest 20 per cent of children around the globe are twice as likely as the richest 20 per cent to be stunted by poor nutrition, or to die before their fifth birthday.

In debating the situation of children victims of non-State armed groups, it is of the essence to highlight and uphold the basic political and legal distinction between armed conflicts and situations of domestic law enforcement. While both categories are currently within the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, they obviously pose entirely different challenges and must be addressed through different policies. On the one hand, armed conflicts being examined by the Council are subject to the rules and regulations of international humanitarian law, such as the obligation by all parties — including non-State actors — to protect children and other civilians. In these cases, diplomatic and legal measures to prevent further violence and to ensure accountability for serious violations all have a role to play. The International Criminal Court in particular is an appropriate mechanism to tackle impunity and to dissuade would-be perpetrators from committing atrocities against children and other vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, cases of domestic law enforcement that do not represent a threat to international peace and security, and therefore fall outside the mandate of the Security Council, should be handled by Governments through national legislation. A different set of standards applies to those circumstances — that of international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments. International cooperation is of course not to be excluded in this domain.

The imperative to ensure their social reintegration and their psychological rehabilitation is a vital aspect of our efforts to protect children formerly associated with armed groups. Sports and cultural initiatives can be instrumental in that regard. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil has partnered with UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and civil society organizations in a project that has allowed hundreds of children formerly linked to armed groups in North Kivu to socialize and to develop new personal identities through the practice of Afro-Brazilian capoeira. This is a successful instance of peacebuilding in practice.

Another approach to shield children from the consequences of war is the granting of refuge. Since 2013, Brazil has adopted policies specifically aimed at welcoming and integrating Syrian refugees and their families. We have granted humanitarian visas to over 6,000 asylum-seekers who were affected by the lasting conflict in Syria, many of whom are boys and girls whose very survival was at risk.

In conclusion, allow me to once again underscore Brazil's firm commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict, both at the multilateral level and through bilateral initiatives. We will remain engaged with the United Nations system and our international partners to promote the safety, the security and the well-being of boys and girls affected by violence around the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

First, I would like to thank the French presidency very much for the continued focus of the Security Council on this important topic, especially today for highlighting the question of non-State armed groups. We would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui and her Office, as well as the work of UNICEF, other United Nations agencies and, of course, the many non-governmental organizations that are doing very important work in the field.

This is a timely, highly relevant and very important debate. As was stated in last year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/339), 51 of 59 parties to armed conflict that have been found to perpetrate grave violations against children are non-State armed groups. The appalling violations by these — such as the mass abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok by Boko Haram, of the 153 Kurdish boys from Ain al-Arab in Syria, and the hundreds of Yezidi children in western Iraq by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and the slaughter of schoolchildren in Peshawar, Pakistan — have left no one untouched. A crime against a child is an affront to our basic value of human decency. We have failed those children. Flagrant violations like those just mentioned need to be prevented and combated.

Women, girls and boys are among the most vulnerable people in conflict-affected settings, and we therefore call for dedicated attention to sexual and gender-based violence. Children continue to be subject to such unspeakable violations, such as rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery and forced marriages. We also know that reintegration into society is especially difficult for child victims. Further attention is needed to help children, adolescents and their communities in these areas. We also need to continue to highlight the fact that the recruitment and use of children as combatants in armed conflict are war crimes. As recommended through the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, we also encourage States to refrain from recruiting children under the age of 18 into their armed forces in order to set an example.

Children's right to quality education in war and disaster is a vital part of protecting children during conflict. Attending school can create a sense of normality in an otherwise chaotic situation. Attacks on schools deprive children may amount to war crimes. We very much welcome efforts to deter the use of schools by armed forces and non-State armed groups in contravention of international law. We encourage all States to engage in the ongoing consultations on a Safe Schools Declaration.

The fight against impunity and assuring victim's access to justice remain crucial. Crimes against children must be investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Individual responsibility must be upheld, and this means that all perpetrators must be held accountable and punished accordingly, regardless of their status or capacity. The International Criminal Court plays an important role in ensuring accountability, and we welcome the initiative of the Prosecutor's Office to develop a comprehensive policy paper on children. We must not forget, however, that

States themselves bear the primary responsibility for protecting their populations, including children, from crimes.

It is essential that personnel in peacekeeping missions have adequate training in the rights of the child, including through predeployment training in child protection. We are therefore happy to inform that Sweden is once again planning to host a United Nations child protection training-of-trainers course at the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre this autumn.

Children are particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises. We would welcome a particular focus on protection in general and child protection in particular in the run-up to World Humanitarian Summit. We note the necessity of intensified dialogue through various channels with non-State actors to prevent violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

As has been mentioned, there is an economic and social dimension to children joining armed groups, as they may be driven by poverty or social exclusion. The Nordic countries are very pleased that ending violence against children is now one of the priorities of the post-2015 agenda.

Before concluding, the Nordic countries would like to congratulate the Special Representative on a successful first year of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which aims to end the recruitment and use of children in conflict by 2016, as endorsed by the Council, and which we wholeheartedly support. It is a victory for the campaign that six out of seven countries concerned have now signed or recommitted to action plans.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Bishnoi (India): We thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the subject of children and armed conflict, with a special focus on child victims of non-State armed groups. We thank your delegation for the concept note that has been prepared (S/2015/168, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and other briefers for the information they have provided.

We note that 2014 was reported to be the worst year as far as children and armed conflict are concerned, and that the pattern continues. This is most distressing. Children are innocent, and they should not be victims of what is not of their making. While we acknowledge the importance of resolution 1612 (2005), the situation also highlights its limitations. The focus on children and armed conflict profiles the issue, as indeed it should. The real solution, however, lies in the achievement of durable peace, and that is what the Council's actions should focus upon.

It is important that United Nations access to non-State armed groups be ensured through the cooperation framework between the United Nations and the concerned national Government. We must be cautious that the United Nations actions not be such as to bypass national Governments and give political legitimacy to non-State actors. It is this legitimacy that they seek the most and which may also, to some extent, be a motivating factor. I will also add that, in the context of monitoring mechanisms, the veracity and credibility of field data can be maintained only through the involvement of national Governments.

We note that the concept note refers to the need for military operations, including peace operations, against non-State armed groups to integrate child protection issues into their operational planning, procedures and operations so as to minimize and prevent child casualties. The drafting of such important mandates would require the Council to have the full cooperation of the host Government of the peacekeeping operation, as well as of the Member States not represented in the Council that contribute troops to such operations. Unfortunately, the latter consultation is not the practice in the Council, although the provisions of Article 44 are quite clear on this.

The concept note also refers to the need to encourage States to adopt legal measures to prohibit and criminalize the use of children under the age of 18. We are not clear how this would help. Illegal armed groups operate outside the law. They kill, torture and maim the innocent. It seems most doubtful that those who resort to illegal armed conflict and terrorism would be deterred from recruiting children if they were prohibited from doing so merely by the law.

Again, the possibility of sanctions and questions of accountability should not lead us to be blindsided. There are references in the concept note to putting more pressure on non-State armed groups, to holding commanders of such groups accountable for their actions, and to raising the normative and political costs

for them. We should not end up in a situation of missing the woods for the trees.

It is also our view that the international community should also strive to address the broader issue of the economic and social marginalization that drives millions of children into the kind of childhood that could make them part of the problem rather than tomorrow's solution. The socioeconomic issues plaguing the poorest nations and the need to eradicate poverty must be the imperatives of our development agenda in order to enable an environment of lasting peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate the French Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I commend the efforts of the Permanent Mission of China for its very effective presidency of the Council last month.

The Iraqi Government has paid great attention to issues related to children because it is our belief that their well being is crucial for the future in all its aspects, including the overall framework for building a new democratic Iraq. However, today my country is confronting serious challenges because of the violent attacks of the criminal terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which seeks to derail the efforts to achieve those objectives and the Government's efforts to spread law and order throughout the country. ISIL's actions have a negative effect on the general enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political human rights. ISIL's criminal practices against children in the areas of Iraq under its control have taken the form of killings, forced displacements and expulsions, sexual violence of all forms, trafficking in children, the deprivation of education, forced recruitment and the use of children in its media material, which contain scenes and ideas that are in complete contradiction with children's innocence and the way they should be raised. All that is in addition to attacks against health and educational facilities that care for children, which constitute a serious challenge and threat to children and the entire Iraqi community.

One of ISIL's most dangerous practices in the context of its attacks on children in Iraq was its attack on the educational process in the areas under its control in Iraq by seeking to change Government textbooks and enforce the use of new textbooks and syllabuses that focus on extremist ideas, the hatred of others, the exclusion of others and involvement in acts of violence. All that represents a threat to children's future and a danger to the educational values of the Iraqi community and the Government's plans in the area of education.

In addition to leaving thousands of children without education or health care because of their flight from ISIL's terrorist attacks, there are tens of thousands of children who remain and, unfortunately, could not escape. They are now subject to ISIL's control and terror. This is a cause of great concern because these entities do not abide by any international conventions or instruments that guarantee the protection of children, and one cannot negotiate with them to guarantee the safety of these children. That leaves the Iraqi Government to confront a huge dilemma. The Government is not able to plead with that enemy and urge it to refrain from recruiting children in the fighting, from using them as suicide bombers or from abusing them through their various brutal methods.

It is extremely important that the international community reaffirm the principles that were adopted over the course of many years for the protection of women and children during wartime. Considering the current situation of Iraq, which is faced with ISIL's terrorism, the Iraqi Government will work hard to reintegrate children and the victims of terrorism in the areas that are liberated from ISIL's control after the terrorist group is defeated. Therefore, the Iraqi Government is focusing its attention and priorities on combatting terrorism and rescuing its community from extremism.

In conclusion, children living in the areas of armed conflict in Iraq face increasing orphanhood because of ISIL's terrorist operations and they will have to deal with ISIL's negative effects on the future of the country. Abducted Yazidi and Christian children also face being forced to abandon their own faiths, adopt brutal ideologies and carry out suicide attacks, as well as being subject to heinous torture and death.

Iraq participates in every way possible in the international "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate today.

(spoke in English)

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union in just a moment.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement, and the briefers for sharing their valuable expertise and insight with us.

Allow me to congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF on the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. We believe that the impact of the campaign to end the recruitment of children by State actors is remarkable, and we are pleased to have been able to make a contribution to it.

Despite the progress achieved, much more needs to be done to tackle the violations committed, especially by non-State actors. To reduce the number of violations, we believe that it is imperative for States concerned to allow direct contacts between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and non-State armed groups.

Allow me to make three operative points on how we may improve the implementation of our children and armed conflict agenda.

First, success depends on an open, constructive and continued dialogue among all Member States, United Nations institutions, civil society organizations and academic centres. That is why Germany recently organized a workshop on the implementation of resolution 1998 (2011), on the protection of schools and hospitals, at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin. During that meeting, we touched upon a question posed by today's concept note (S/2015/168, annex): How can the documentation of abuse be improved? One finding on this issue was the potentially useful role of new technologies, such as, for example, the Watchlist mobile phone application. Germany therefore encourages all stakeholders to explore ways and means to apply new technologies to monitoring and reporting. Technological tools must become standard best practice when documenting grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

Secondly, with regard to United Nations peace operations, we believe that more can be done to protect civilians, in particular children, and therefore these aspects should be strengthened. That is why Germany has funded the development of respective Department of Peacekeeping Operations training materials, and we hope to see them applied across the board. Germany also considers it important that the ongoing peace operations review duly consider this aspect. This must start with attention given to sufficient child protection capacity in peace operation mandates right from a mission's outset. When needed and appropriate, a sufficient number of dedicated child protection officers should be part of the mission's staff.

Thirdly and lastly, in order to strengthen accountability for perpetrators, we encourage the Council to include grave violations against children as a designation criterion in sanctions committees, and encourage the Special Representative to continue to share information with appropriate sanctions committees. We also believe that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should share country-specific conclusions with the relevant committees.

Let me also underline the need for situations to be considered by the International Criminal Court when applicable. International justice mechanisms must play their part in strengthening accountability. The recent confirmation of the judgement against Thomas Lubanga for recruiting and using child soldiers is a case in point.

More than 270 schoolgirls remain in captivity in Nigeria; 153 Kurdish boys were abducted by the so-called Islamic State from Ain al-Arab in Syria. Hundreds of Yazidi children have been abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh in western Iraq. Many more brutal acts against children are committed on a daily basis. Such acts not only send families into deep distress, they also impact the potential of future generations. Therefore, there needs to be a call for States and the international community to engage in further concerted action without delay. Let me assure the Council of Germany's readiness to assist it in that effort.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia

and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I want to thank the speakers who have taken or will take part in today's discussions, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, to whom we reiterate our firm and continuing support. We also wish to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this debate.

The fact that 51 of the 59 parties listed in the Secretary-General's report of last year (see S/2014/339) are non-State armed actors illustrates the extraordinary importance of today's debate, namely, the way we manage the issue of child victims of non-State armed groups. The various conflicts we face today and that involve non-State armed groups engender appalling suffering for children. I shall give two examples. The first is the scandalous atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram, in particular against children, as illustrated by the abduction of approximately 276 young girls from Chibok. Those girls were subjected to abuses, including physical and psychological violence, forced labour, coerced participation in military operations, forced marriages with their captors, sexual violence and rape. As to the second example, in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh commits barbaric acts against children, recruiting them into their combat units, forcing them to participate in executions and inflicting various forms of violence and physical and psychological abuse, such as cruel and degrading treatment, sexual violence and rape.

(*spoke in English*)

It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that all children are able to attend school and to grow up free from fear and violence, no matter where they live. In that regard, we must not forget the responsibility of States to protect their populations, including children, from atrocity crimes. We need to intensify efforts to address abuses and violations committed by non-State armed groups against children through a series of measures. For example, we need to facilitate the adoption of action plans and, more important, work towards their effective implementation. So far, only 12 action plans have been concluded with non-State armed groups. In order to implement them it is essential that Member States allow the United Nations unconditional access to non-State armed groups for the purpose of ending and preventing violations and abuses against children. In addition, child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children, need to be addressed in peace negotiations.

Furthermore, we need to ensure accountability. Twenty-five non-State armed groups have been listed for at least five years, and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators. Fighting impunity needs to be part and parcel of our actions and, whereas the primary responsibility lies with States, the International Criminal Court has an essential role to play in that regard.

Moreover, we need to better protect schools against attacks and deter their use for military purposes in accordance with international law. We welcome the decision in resolution 2143 (2014) to request enhanced monitoring of and reporting on the military use of schools. We also need to include child protection in military training and standard operating procedures, undertake targeted and operational training of United Nations troop and police contingents and ensure the inclusion of child protection provisions in the mandates of peace operations.

We need to address the worrisome pattern of the abduction of children. One measure in that regard would be to add abductions as a new trigger for listing. Recent abductions in Nigeria, Iraq and South Sudan are just some examples for the need to act more decisively in that area.

We need to give priority to combating sexual and gender-based violence committed against children, including violations committed by non-State armed groups.

Finally, we need to ensure effective reintegration in order to prevent re-recruitment by armed groups.

The EU and its member States have made considerable strides to address the issue in a comprehensive manner. Let me name just a few recent measures.

We have strengthened our capacity on child protection through regular training for our staff, and are currently finalizing our predeployment child protection training module for civilian and military personnel. The European Union is working with the International Labour Organization and UNICEF on a project to reintegrate former child combatants in Somalia. We also support the "Geneva Call" project's review and promotion of the implementation of the so-called deeds

of commitment for non-State actors. Soon, the European will launch a €9.3 million call for proposals for conflict prevention and peacebuilding that prioritize actions on child combatants and child victims.

In conclusion, I also want to underline our strong support for the United Nations campaign "Children, Not Soldiers", which celebrates its first anniversary this month and which the European Union and its member States have strongly supported from its inception. Looking ahead, this summer will mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. That will be an excellent opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and what challenges still lie ahead.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt): At the outset, I would like to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month, and I thank the French Mission for its timely choice of this topic.

The latest world events have shown that children are the most affected by the consequences of armed conflict, a situation worsened by the involvement of non-State terrorist armed groups. There is a trend among such groups to abduct children in order to terrify both Governments and populations. Those children are sexually abused, injured, maimed or even killed. They are also used as combatants for those groups. It is not only abduction; unfortunately, children are persuaded to join those terrorist groups because of economic, social and security pressures.

While we celebrate this year the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005) and the first anniversary of the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers", and despite the great efforts exerted by Governments and different United Nations agencies to reverse the negative impacts of terrorist acts of those groups on children, that negative trend is increasing steadily. In that context, Egypt would like to stress the following points.

First, we condemn all forms of violence against children by terrorist armed groups in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Central Africa, Nigeria, South Sudan, Libya and other countries.

Secondly, there is a wide gap between the adoption of relevant Security Council resolutions and their implementation. In that regard, Egypt proposes the establishment of a more coordinated and consolidated system to collect proper data and monitor the implementation of the relevant resolutions. That new system should include the updating of resolution 1612 (2005) to encompass non-State terrorist armed groups.

Thirdly, more efforts should be exerted regarding transitional justice measures in order to bring the perpetrators of such acts against children to justice, with special focus on providing the necessary treatment for children affected by such experiences, especially girls.

Fourthly, affected children must be rehabilitated and reintegrated economically, socially and culturally in society in order to avoid their re-recruitment by the same or other groups.

Fifthly, more financial resources must be secured for the expeditious implementation of the children and armed conflicts agenda.

Sixthly, discussions within the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations should continue so as to find the best solutions to the challenges facing peacekeeping missions in providing full protection for children in armed conflicts.

The primary responsibility for protecting civilians, including children, falls on countries, in accordance with the various universally agreed legal instruments and relevant Security Council resolutions. Based on that conviction, Egypt believes that dealing with the root causes of such conflicts, including poverty and social exclusion, is the sole solution to any conflict. There is no single formula for that solution. It should be designed by each State in accordance with its priorities, resources and national strategy in order to guarantee national ownership of that solution and maintain societal stability at the end.

We reiterate Egypt's position in unequivocally condemning all acts of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, irrespective of its motivation and objectives, and regardless of the nature of its perpetrators, whether they are individuals, groups or States. No sustainable development agenda can be properly applied, given the increasing rates of insecurity for our children, who are our coming generations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. Allow me to take this

opportunity to thank today's speakers for sharing their expertise and insights.

Around the world today, children are exploited in conflict, targeted with violence and used as instruments of war. The crimes are horrendous. In January, Boko Haram wrapped a young girl in explosives and sent her into a busy Nigerian market. The explosion killed 16 people and injured another 20. This is not a world we should accept — a world where 10-year-olds are used as weapons of war. When we fail to protect children, we fail to protect our future.

I speak before the Council today as the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel, but also as a father and grandfather. I raised my sons, Lior and Tourer, and my daughter, Oren, in Israel, and I know all too well the abnormal normality of raising a family in Israel. Our children go to schools with security guards stationed at the door, we walk through metal detectors to enter a mall, and our homes are built with reinforced concrete to protect our families from rockets. Like other Israeli parents, I want to see the day when our children can grow up and grow old without hearing the wail of a red-alert siren or the boom of rockets overhead. We want our children to enjoy a life free from acts of terrorism, but that day has not yet come.

In June 2014, Israelis were numb with horror when they learned that Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and brutally murdered three Israeli teenagers, Eyal, Gilad and Naftali. We learned that terrorists will target an Israeli child making his way home from school. In August 2014, 4-year-old Daniel Tregerman was playing with his younger siblings when a mortar fired by Palestinian terrorists from Gaza struck his home and killed him. We learned that terrorists will target an Israeli child playing in his own home. In December 2014, Palestinian terrorists threw a firebomb at a car carrying 11-year-old Ayala Shapira. Flames engulfed the car, and Ayala suffered third-degree burns to her face and upper body. We learned that terrorists will even target an Israeli child sitting in the back seat of her parent's car. The Israeli people have learned too many painful lessons. Terrorists have robbed our children of their dreams, their childhood and their futures.

Hamas may claim to represent its people's well-being, but its actions reflect countless wrongdoings. The terrorist group deploys minors as suicide bombers and recruits them to carry out attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers. It uses children as human shields and places children in harm's way by using schools, hospitals and civilian neighbourhoods as a base for their terror activity.

We saw abundant evidence of those crimes in summer 2014. Here in New York, the underground system is called the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. In Gaza, Hamas built a metropolitan terror authority — miles of dense terror tunnels that extended like tentacles into Israel. Those tunnels were built using Palestinian child labourers, many of whom were killed in the process. Hamas' terror tunnels opened at the doorsteps of Israeli communities, outside homes, kindergartens and playgrounds, with the deliberate intention of targeting and murdering Israeli children.

The Palestinian leadership regularly turns to the international community for financial support, but when it comes to funding, training, arming and indoctrinating thousands of young Palestinian children, there is no shortage of money. In January, Hamas, which sits in the Palestinian unity Government, sent over 17,000 Palestinian youngsters to 18 new military training camps. The boys who attend those camps are trained to fire weapons, storm Israel Defense Forces (IDF) posts and abduct IDF soldiers.

The indoctrination of Palestinian children is nothing new. They are born in hospitals named after violent Palestinian groups, attend schools named after terrorists and taught from textbooks that describe Zionism as racism. In mosques, religious leaders are spreading vicious libel, accusing Jews of destroying Muslim holy sites. In their free time, Palestinian children play on sports teams named after murderers, watch television programmes that teach that Jews should be killed, and read cartoons urging them to commit terror attacks against Israelis.

But the Council does not have to take my word for it. Senior Hamas official Fathi Hamad said that,

> "For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry ... This is why we have formed human shields of the women, the children, and the elderly."

The evidence is overwhelming. Hamas has no interest in building its people up. It is only committed to tearing Israel down. Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said, "We will only have peace when our enemies love their children more than they hate ours".

Across the Middle East, terrorists and extremists are poisoning the minds of the next generation, teaching them to hate, vilify and dehumanize Israelis and Jews.

We have lost an entire generation to incitement. Enough is enough. Send the message that children should be sent to playgrounds and not battlegrounds, that they belong in schools and not on suicide missions and, most importantly, that they have infinite value as human beings and not human shields.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala): We thank the delegation of France for organizing this very timely open debate, which allows us to address violations against the most vulnerable people — children — and the comprehensive concept note (S/2015/168, annex) that it circulated to all delegations. We also thank the main speakers, especially Junior Nzita, former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and goodwill ambassador for the action plan in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his striking statement.

The abuses committed against children by non-State armed groups constitute a violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law and are an affront to our humanity, as they deprive our children of a better world. They can have devastating long-term consequences for victims, their families and the communities where they reside. We must devote special attention to the protection of children, who are unquestionably most at risk in armed conflict. They are recruited by armed groups and are the victims of rape, sexual exploitation and abuse. As if that were not enough, they are then stigmatized within their own communities. We would like to highlight here the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and the progress achieved to date in the six countries committed to that campaign.

As the Secretary-General noted in his briefing this morning and suggested in his most recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339), the world's children should be students, not soldiers. That is why the necessary assistance and support for the rehabilitation of these children and their proper reintegration into their communities should be ensured. We urge Governments and the international community to ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes receive the necessary resources and funding to operate in the affected communities.

We consider it necessary to reiterate the provisions of resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014) in which the Council called upon the parties to conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education. We once again call on Member States to consider concrete measures to stop the military use of schools by armed groups. We underline the civilian nature of schools in accordance with international humanitarian law and strongly condemn the attacks in recent months in Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. We therefore have supported initiatives to combat the problem, such as the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which we consider to provide a good framework for calling both State and non-State actors to immediately cease attacking and threatening schools, students and teachers and refrain from actions that impede the access of children to education.

We are concerned about the emergence of new and more radical armed groups, the fragmentation of armed forces and the expansion of other, harsher groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Boko Haram, which have changed the landscape of armed conflict by forging alliances, as well as the emergence of other structures, some in opposition to Governments and others associated with them. We categorically condemn the deplorable acts committed by extremist groups, including the use of children in suicide attacks. We are dismayed at the mass kidnapping of children by these non-State armed groups. Who can forget the 276 girls abducted in Nigeria by Boko Haram, the 153 Kurdish boys abducted by ISIL in Syria and the case of hundreds of Yazidi children who were also kidnapped by ISIL in western Iraq? We call for the immediate release of these children. These cases, among others, show the need to broaden the criteria for inclusion of other parties to armed conflict in the annexes of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

We would like to highlight the importance of Member States improve their subregional, regional and international cooperation, including through exchange of intelligence and information, coordinated action and the development of best practices to prevent, document and address violations against children in armed conflict. The fight against impunity must remain one of the fundamental aspects of our efforts not only to react to grave violations against children but also to prevent them. We must make better use of tools available to

the Council — and use them consistently — to ensure that those responsible are prosecuted, include them in sanctions regimes, redouble efforts to strengthen national capacity in the judicial sector and strengthen the framework of international justice by, inter alia, referring those responsible to the International Criminal Court.

The conviction in 2012 of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo and the referral to the Court in 2013 of the *Bosco Ntaganda* case have sent a clear message about the legal consequences of child recruitment, which is considered a war crime. We are in favour of a closer dialogue with the International Criminal Court.

Finally, we call on the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to ensure that armed groups listed in the annexes to his annual reports are informed of these listings and guarantee that action plans to put a stop to these violations are implemented. In addition, strategies should be developed to ensure that armed groups are informed of the conclusions reached by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's important debate. We appreciate the insightful briefings by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, as well as the perspective provided by the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and civil society representatives. We hope that our deliberations today and the concept note circulated by the French delegation (S/2015/168, annex) will become useful guidelines on how to prevent and effectively respond to the abuse of children by non-State armed groups and bring the perpetrators to swift justice.

Violence and attacks on children, particularly by non-State actors, are on the rise globally. Armed groups have committed barbaric acts of terror against children. But children are also victims of brutal force in several situations of foreign occupation. We all witnessed on our television screens what happened to the children of Gaza. We join the international community in condemning these atrocities in the strongest terms. Terrorist groups have intentionally targeted and attacked schoolchildren. They have killed, abducted and inflicted serious injuries on thousands of children in utter disregard of all norms of humanity and international law.

The massacre of over a 100 school children — 132, in fact — in my country's city of Peshawar three months ago was one of the worst atrocities perpetrated against children. In so doing, these terrorist outfits have sunk to new levels of cruelty and displayed a reprehensible capacity to attack the core values of humanity. The Peshawar school attack has strengthened the resolve of the Government and the people of Pakistan to combat terrorist violence and the groups that inflict it. It has further reinforced our national consensus to defeat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. That school children across my country stood in solidarity with the victims of Peshawar and expressed an unshakable, collective resolve to confront terrorists sent a powerful message that schools could not be forced to close down in fear, nor would children be cowed by such cowardly attacks. These children — in my country and beyond — have been inspired by the power of Malala Yousafzai, Pakistan's Nobel Prize winner, who took a bullet in her head rather than submit to the terrorists' dictates or agenda. Her act of extraordinary courage became a symbol of resistance to the evil designs of violent groups.

Pakistan has embarked upon an effective law enforcement campaign, which includes what we call Zarb-e-Azb, a military campaign in our tribal area, to take out terrorists, dismantle their networks and halt the flow of finances to them from inside and outside the country. We have learned by doing. That is why Pakistan recognizes that while the use of force may be necessary it is not sufficient to effectively eradicate the menace. Non-kinetic measures such as developing a counter-narrative to defeat the terrorists' twisted ideology, are just as important, if not more so.

Pakistan is implementing a comprehensive national plan of action to address this very complex and imposing challenge. It involves police and security actions, building resilience in local communities against radicalization as well as political, economic, social and financial measures.

Preventing the recruitment and indoctrination of children by extremist and militant organizations is a priority area for us, as is focusing on education to promote tolerance and harmony. Key steps that we have taken include the registration and regulation of religious seminaries, curbs on hate material and literature, and the introduction of a modern school curriculums. But even as Pakistan executes its campaign against terrorists and acts to protect its children, sharing best

practices and experience gained by different countries can help strengthen our collective response to keep our citizens and our children safe from the violent actions of armed groups.

Finally, I would wish to underscore that the legal parameters of the Council mandate must be respected. Our focus should remain on situations of armed conflict and those threatening international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this debate of great importance to us.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, as well as the representatives of UNICEF and all the non-governmental organizations for the testimonies we have heard here.

The importance of this debate, organized by France, is evident from having heard the moving statements of the speakers who have preceded me, which illustrate the turbulent times in which we live and that affects the most vulnerable segments of the population, including children, as pointed out by France in its concept note (S/2015/168, annex). The year 2014 was the worst year for children.

Unfortunately, my country has not been an exception, because we must recognize that for more than five decades of internal conflict, minors have been victims of forced recruitment and abuse by non-State armed groups. However, today there is a glimmer of hope to end this phenomenon, because we have been holding peace talks, which are currently under way in Havana between the national Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005) provides a good opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Colombian State to the protection of all victims, particularly children. I would like to share five key points that demonstrate that commitment:

First, the 1991 Constitution of Colombia guarantees in its spirit that the rights of children take precedence over all other rights.

Secondly, Colombia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the year 1992 and expanded the definition of a child from under 15 to under 18 years of age.

Thirdly, for almost two decades now, the ranks of the armed forces of Colombia do not include minors under the age of 18.

Fourthly, the Colombian Ministry for Foreign Affairs has implemented a comprehensive programme for children and adolescents aimed at preventing forced recruitment by creating gateways to promote educational, cultural and sporting activities.

Fifthly and finally, the Government established a multi-sectoral commission in which 23 different State agencies work in tandem. Thanks to that, between 2002 and 2014, we have been able to recover 4,067 minors who had been recruited by the illegal armed groups, both from the FARC and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional.

As I have mentioned, Colombia is working diligently to resolve the internal armed conflict with the FARC. We are continuing negotiations on an overall agreement on ending the conflict and building stable and lasting peace. That agreement is being negotiated in Havana, with the support of the United Nations and a large part of the international community and with Cuba and Norway acting as guarantors and Chile and Venezuela as supporters. The FARC has begun to take steps in the direction that Colombian society and the international community demand, as expressed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. In the past month, the FARC announced its decision to cease its recruitment of children under 17 years. That is a significant development, but it is insufficient if we consider that the FARC is responsible for 66 per cent of the victims of child recruitment in our country — almost 3,000 children. We hope that step will be expanded to cover all minors under the age of 18.

As part of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2015), Colombia believes this is the right time to review whether the measures requested of States, such as the action plans, have the same result when attempting to implement such measures for non-State actors. Even today, when we live in a world where conflict dynamics have changed, illegal armed groups still constitute the bulk of the armed groups that threaten the legitimacy of the State and that of its citizens. In our view, the role of States to

bear the primary responsibility is indisputable, but we must not lose sight of the specific contexts, nature and modus operandi of the armed groups outside the law, as well as the strategies that States implement to achieve solutions to the grave situations that affect them.

In conclusion, all those points serve to bring to the fore the fact that the support of the international community will be essential, given that we are immersed in in the most important undertaking in 50 years: to build peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me first extend my delegation's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this timely open debate on a very important challenge regarding the protection of children in armed conflict.

Indonesia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It is deeply regrettable that children and other vulnerable segments of the population continue to bear the brunt in a number of armed conflicts. Indeed, too often children are despicably and with impunity used as tactical agents, becoming fodder in a conflict and enduring physical and emotional scars. That tragedy is worsened when non-State actors are involved, as they may simply refuse to heed the international legal standards for safeguarding children and other vulnerable groups, by which the States must abide.

Indonesia stands for zero tolerance when it comes to violations against children in armed conflict. Notwithstanding the valuable work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other United Nations entities to protect children — and while we welcome the encouraging progress made thanks to the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign since its launch, in March 2014 — the United Nations needs to send out a more unequivocal message that is backed with actions. Whether State or non-State actors, all perpetrators of violence and abuse against children in armed conflict must know that our international system will not give them any space. They will have to answer for their violations against children under the full extent of the law.

We recognize that, in some situations involving non-State actors, relief might be secured for children and other vulnerable groups through negotiations. Non-State actors may well be persuaded to exercise restraint, and we should capitalize on such opportunities. Therefore, we support the incorporation of the issue into mediation in peacemaking. While we can only support such a respite — and hopefully, the eventual permanent rehabilitation of victimized children — the United Nations and the international community should develop a systematized approach. In that regard, we would like to share some of our views.

First, the key and ongoing objective should be to assist conflict-affected States to establish well-functioning institutions that are accountable to their citizens, which can enable a legitimately representative Government to extend its writ across the entire territory of the country. The rule of law should prevail. There must not be any no-go areas where non-State actors can build sanctuaries, thereby providing oxygen for domestic or external conflict and terrorism.

Secondly, we must all contribute more to strengthening the implementation of the global normative framework on the protection of children in armed conflict, within the United Nations and beyond. Our action should signal that there will be neither tolerance for child soldiers nor lax measures in our efforts to safeguard children and their rights in conflict. Recognizing that sensitizing non-State actors on the imperative and benefits of the protection of children poses special difficulties, the United Nations and all concerned entities should nonetheless be relentless in their efforts. While those imperatives should be clear in the United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding engagements, it is equally vital that United Nations personnel continue and strengthen their consultations and cooperation with national Governments and local authorities.

Thirdly, regional and subregional organizations, such as ASEAN in our region, have demonstrated that they can be critical enablers for peace and development. The United Nations should further strengthen its partnerships with such organizations, as well as with civil society groups that are carrying out useful work. We are therefore pleased that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General places priority on partnering with regional and subregional organizations. That will bolster the United Nations agenda on children and armed conflict.

Standing resolutely together, we must all ensure that the observance of international human rights

and humanitarian law on the protection of children is given the utmost priority. Indonesia also underlines the need to provide greater support for child victims, be they former under-age combatants or those affected by violence or displacement. Since their physical health and educational and emotional needs may persist for a long time, we also stress the role of the family and the community in creating an enabling environment for them. As a State party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Indonesia is internationally committed to improving the training and capacity of its peacekeepers on the subject, including through the use of its national peacekeeping centre.

Finally, I would like to underscore that the most important step in protecting children's rights is preventing conflict itself. In addition, enhanced efforts to protect children in armed conflict should be carried out, even during peace time, including by building national capacities and institutions and by sensitizing the public at large to the issues. Indonesia will continue to put a high priority on safeguarding children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Ms. Lind (Estonia) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the French presidency for having organized today's open debate.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to thank the briefers for their statements earlier today.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The focus of this debate on non-State armed groups is particularly pertinent, since, as the concept note annexed to the letter by the French presidency (S/2015/168, annex) reveals, the overwhelming majority of the parties — 51 out of 59 — listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's 2014 report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339) are non-State actors.

We have seen progress with regard to national security forces. Thousands of children have been released as a result of action plans mandated by the Security Council. We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui and UNICEF for their enormous work, most recently through the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign.

We believe that the main measures that need to be taken with non-State armed groups are similar to those used when working with national security forces, namely, to focus on prevention, action plans and ending impunity for the crimes committed.

We all know that education is one of the key elements for prevention. It is therefore important to guarantee education for children, even in times of crisis. During emergencies, children in schools can be cared for, accounted for and protected from abduction, recruitment and sexual and economic exploitation. Schools should be for children and should never and under no condition be used for military purposes.

Let me express our appreciation to UNICEF for providing education to children in humanitarian crises. Estonia has recently supported UNICEF's work in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Gaza, Syria and Somalia.

We urge all armed non-State actors listed in the annex to the latest Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict to adopt and implement action plans committing themselves to end grave violations against children, and we call on the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to develop strategies for outreach to armed non-State actors. We also urge concerned Governments to facilitate and support the engagement of non-State armed groups with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF.

We see impunity as clearly being one of the main reasons for the recurrence of such grave violations against children. It is only by consistent prosecution that we can deter the commission of such crimes. To that end, we reiterate the important role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in situations where States are unable or unwilling to bring perpetrators to justice domestically.

Furthermore, we also believe that the international community should assist in strengthening national judicial capacities so as to ensure accountability, including through the development of legislation criminalizing violations against children. Estonia allocates development cooperation resources to assist countries requesting help in the domestic prosecution of Rome Statute crimes, and we encourage others to do the same.

The Council itself has on numerous occasions acknowledged that the fight against impunity for

atrocious crimes, including against children, has been strengthened through the work of the ICC. To make good on its commitment to deal effectively with persistent perpetrators, the Council could increase pressure on them by including violations against children in the mandates of all sanctions committees and by improving the exchange of information between the Council, the sanctions committees and the ICC to include the individuals sought by the ICC on the sanctions lists.

The recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups is a grave violation of international law. We categorically condemn the barbaric acts committed on a large scale by violent extremists. We are appalled by the mass abductions of children by non-State armed groups, be it by Boko Haram in Nigeria or by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in Syria or Iraq. We call for the immediate release of all abducted children without delay.

In that connection, we call on the Security Council to introduce the abduction of children as an additional criterion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the flow to the representative of Hungary.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): In all cultures, one of the most important factors is the cohesion of families and communities and the degree of nurture and support that children receive. Indeed, one of the most significant war traumas of all, in particular for younger children, is simply separation from their parents. It is universally true that such horrific experiences are so deeply disturbing and overwhelming that a child will try to suppress those bad memories rather than confront them. The trauma of exposure to violence and death has an emotional impact on generations of young people for the rest of their lives.

Time does not heal trauma. A child must be helped to express suffering and to confront such bad memories with the support and guidance of an informed and knowledgeable adult. The very act of talking or writing about or even acting out the traumatic events is a way for a child to begin healing and start on the road to recovery.

I therefore thank France, and you, Sir, for having organized this very important open debate. I must say that I was completely gripped by the experiences of Junior Nzita, who shared his very real traumas with us.

Hungary fully supports the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and welcomes the focus of today's debate on non-State armed groups.

For children, 2014 was the worst year in many years, as the proliferation of conflicts around the world affected tens of millions of them. Today, we have already talked about the fact that impunity continues to be deeply entrenched and that most perpetrators are never held accountable for the war crimes they commit. I believe that the recent decision of the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC), in December of last year, was an important milestone, since it confirmed the verdict against Thomas Lubanga, who became the first person ever to be convicted for the enlistment, conscription and use of children in hostilities. We share the view of the Prosecutor of the ICC that the decision stands as a symbol of hope and an important step towards putting an end to the suffering of children who are still being forced to fight, kill and die in armed conflicts. Hungary fully supports the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched last year by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Of course, children have always been caught up in warfare. They usually have little choice but to experience at a minimum the same horrors as their parents. In such violent circumstances, girls in particular suffer the added trauma of sexual abuse and rape, which psychologists have identified as the most invasive of traumatic events. Even girls who are not physically forced to have sex may still be obliged to trade sexual favours for food or shelter or physical protection. Girls often face a greater risk of forced abduction, sexual slavery and forced marriage. What is also very frightening nowadays is the escalation in the use of children as fighters. Extremist groups successfully manipulate young boys and girls, and we must find ways to counter the propaganda used by terrorist groups to recruit susceptible children and young people.

Hungary believes in the strength of education. We are very concerned about the fact that attacks on hospitals and schools have become a common feature in most armed conflicts. The increasing use of schools for military purposes is particularly worrying, since that puts more children out of school and thus at an increased risk of violence. But we truly believe that the power of education in preventing young children from

joining extremist groups is extremely important, and something that all of us must think about and work for.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Ms. Frankinet (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium associates itself fully with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Belgium deplores the fact that armed conflicts continue to have a disproportionate effect on children. The year 2014 has been called a very bad one for children, and there are no prospects for improvement in 2015. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General indicated in her annual report to the Human Rights Council, the indoctrination of children by extremist groups is creating new challenges in terms of their protection, psychosocial rehabilitation and reintegration. The recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups is growing. Children are often recruited by force or abducted, but some join non-State armed groups because of economic, social or security pressures, and must be offered genuine alternatives to such groups. In our view, prevention is the only lasting solution to the problem of children's participation in armed conflict. In that regard, it is essential that States come up with prevention plans that cover every aspect of the issue — a plan that effectively prevents the recruitment and exploitation of children and that, among other things, provides schooling in safety. A recent study has shown that investing in prevention can in some ways generate a good return on that investment. The total cost of children's association with armed groups is estimated to be between $120 and $144 million a year.

Belgium remains very concerned about the fact that many perpetrators of violence against children do so with impunity. The greatest challenge in that area is unquestionably the increasing number of persistent violators, who continue to deliberately ignore the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we would like to reiterate that the Council has no choice but to increase the pressure on those who perpetrate serious abuses against children, particularly those identified as persistent violators, and to continue to consider ways to apply targeted measures against such criminals. That is quite simply a matter of accountability and of holding those who commit grave violations against children to account. We all know that combating impunity and determining responsibility are important and effective deterrents.

Finally, Belgium would like to recall the importance of the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups for child victims of non-State armed groups. They include tools designed to assist action to prevent children's recruitment by such groups, and we would invite those countries that have not yet signed the Paris Principles to do so as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. As this is the first time in March that Thailand takes the floor in the Security Council, I would like to join other speakers in congratulating France on its presidency of the Council this month. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her briefing.

Thailand associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the represntative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and by the Ambassador of Austria on behalf of the Human Security Network.

In order for them to become responsible and productive citizens of the world, children must grow up in an environment of peace, love and understanding, not violence. Thailand reaffirms its commitment and resolve in support of international efforts to assure such an environment for every child. This year Thailand is particularly concerned about the exacerbation of current armed conflicts by the added elements of extremism and terrorism, which have inflicted suffering on children that will undoubtedly be repeated for many others around the world if we do not act. The perpetrators of such violent acts must be brought to justice, since they not only violate international legal norms; they also cut short the lives of our young people, who represent the future itself.

We condemn any involvement, anywhere and by anyone — including non-State armed groups — of children in situations of violence and armed conflict. The suffering of children, particularly girls, in these situations is unacceptable to us. That is why we are committed to efforts to stop violence against children and to address violations of children's rights in armed conflict situations, including the killing, maiming and

recruitment of and sexual violence against children, as well as the abduction of and denial of humanitarian access to children in armed conflict. In this regard, we commend the success of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.

The timing of this debate is also ideal. This year marks the landmark tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In this regard, I would like to commend Malaysia and Luxembourg, the current and previous Chairs of the Working Group, for the outstanding work accomplished to date.

Thailand is convinced that ongoing armed conflicts require coordinated international efforts to protect children. Allow me to outline some of the elements that we believe should be an integral part of our joint efforts.

First, human rights and international humanitarian law must be fully respected. Secondly, Thailand believes that child protection in all situations remains the sovereign responsibility of every State in accordance with its obligations under international law. The United Nations must therefore work in close cooperation with the Governments concerned on the basis of their consent. In several armed conflicts in which non-State actors commit crimes against children, the United Nations must be fully aware of the sensitivities on the ground and of the need to work closely with host Governments to tackle the problem.

Thirdly, given the multitude of international agencies involved with child protection, we need to strengthen cooperation and coordination among them. Thailand was pleased to co-chair, along with Austria, work on the drafting of the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (resolution 69/194), which was submitted to the General Assembly last year. Indeed, Thailand believes that there is a need to address all aspects of the work of the United Nations regarding the protection of children.

Fourthly, to remain useful and credible, the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict should be the outcome of constructive consultations with the Member States concerned and should be based on accurate, objective, reliable and verifiable information. With the rise of extremism and terrorism over the past year, it is more essential than ever to have credible information to steer the Council's efforts towards putting an end to the suffering of children in situations of armed conflict.

Lastly, as part of our comprehensive effort to tackling the problems facing children in armed conflict, we must not overlook the importance of addressing past traumas. Thailand therefore urges that greater emphasis be placed on reintegration efforts for affected children. National long-term strategies must be formulated so as to improve education and socioeconomic conditions, as well as ensure the rule of law, which will make it possible better to protect children from the threats and dangers of armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his commitment to the plight of children caught in conflict and our briefers for their tireless efforts to protect the world's most vulnerable.

Australia reaffirms its commitment to the Paris Principles and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict. We encourage all States that have not already ratified or acceded to the Convention and Protocol to do so expeditiously.

Despite the progress made in the 16 years since the issue of children and armed conflict first appeared on the Council's agenda, armed conflict continues to take a terrible toll on children around the globe. As the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, the Al-Assad regime's cruelty shows no signs of abating. A generation of Syrian children faces deprivation, displacement, violence, under-vaccination, malnutrition and disrupted education. Schools are attacked, most often by Syrian Government forces. Half of the refugees from Syria are children.

We are alarmed by the threat posed to children by extremist groups. Daesh continues its deplorable campaign of violence, including crucifixions, beheadings and mass executions. Children are not immune, as victims, witnesses and — disturbingly — as forced participants.

Girls are especially vulnerable. Daesh supports the sexual abuse of girls who have not yet reached puberty

and operates brothels where non-Muslim Iraqi women and girls are held as sex slaves for Daesh terrorist fighters. Resolution 2178 (2014) requires all nations to prevent the financing, travel and activities of these terrorists. It must be implemented fully by all States. Stronger and more effective measures must be taken to protect children, and, importantly, to rehabilitate them.

Non-State armed groups engaged in peace processes are more likely to engage on child protection. In the Philippines, Australia has worked closely with UNICEF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to establish community-based child-protection networks, which have strengthened child-protection systems in MILF command and conflict-affected areas.

It is crucial that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General continue her efforts to conclude action plans with non-State armed groups, difficult though that is. We urge Governments to facilitate and support engagement by the Special Representative to develop action plans and prevent the abuse and exploitation of children.

Where parties to a conflict fail to adhere to their obligations under international law, the Council should use the tools at its disposal to ensure accountability, including by providing political support for the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC). ICC actions can have an important deterrent effect on the use of child soldiers by rebel groups. The vast majority of groups listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports have been abusing children for more than five years. This impunity cannot persist. Sanctions should be used to full effect against those perpetrating grave violations against children. We welcome the fact that five sanctions Committees are already focused on child protection.

The world has expressed its outrage at Boko Haram's kidnapping of children and its targeting of schools. As others have done, we encourage the Council to expand its listing criteria to include abductions of children, and request the Secretary-General to include in his annual report those parties to a conflict that engage in these abhorrent acts.

We expect that the high-level review of sanctions will provide a strong blueprint to improve the coordination and implementation of sanctions, including the Council's response to the abuse and exploitation of children. We encourage all States to redouble their efforts to protect children caught up in conflict. The Council must continue to seek practical means to ensure the protection of children. We cannot do enough to protect children. As others here have said today, they are, after all, our future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I thank the French presidency for having convened this very timely meeting to address the inhuman, brutal attacks committed against children and their recruitment as soldiers by non-State actors during armed conflicts as well as in States with chronic instability and simmering tensions.

The international community has been shocked by the sudden proliferation of the diverse non-State actors that have emerged domestically within a country and also those acting transnationally over 80 countries, thereby internationalizing their threat. My delegation, keeping in mind time constraints, therefore suggests the following measures.

First, we must recognize the fact that non-State actors are not monolithic. While some commit horrific crimes and are often beyond negotiation, such groups vary widely. To work with them, we need to understand their degree of extremism, political and religious motives, structures, tactics and amenability to dialogue.

Secondly, we endorse UNICEF's "Children, Not Soldiers" initiative and the signing of action plans for the release of children — to be rigorously implemented by the 59 non-State actors listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/339).

Thirdly, we should encourage concerned Member States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights commmissions to facilitate contact between the United Nations and non-State actors to get them to agree to and sign action plans aimed at ensuring broad and effective protection for children. Such contacts should not prejudge the political or legal status of those non-State actors. We therefore need child protection criteria in the renewal or establishment of the relevant sanctions committees, with specific child-protection expertise in the subsidiary organs and expert groups of the Council. The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should be made more effective through greater unity among its members.

Fourthly, it is critical to have child protection included more clearly in all mandates of United Nations

peacekeeping operations, special political missions and peacebuilding missions, and to ensure that those operations and missions are appropriately resourced with personnel and funding. We strongly encourage troop- and police-contributing countries to include child protection in their predeployment training. We recommend closer cooperation between the Secretariat and the United Nations system and its partners so as to ensure swift implementation, monitoring and reporting.

Fifthly, we should mobilize the machinery of the NGO community, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Save the Children Alliance and the Geneva Call, with its Deed of Commitment, which non-State actors have signed with a view to protecting children's rights, since non-State actors cannot be signatories to Conventions.

The donor community has to address the funding gaps for implementing action plans, ensuring the sustainable long-term reintegration needs of children and child soldiers and guaranteering adequate monitoring and reporting. Funds will also be required to integrate former child soldiers into normal life by providing them with education and by showing better understanding so that they do not return to their recruiters. Investing in development, providing better living conditions and meeting socioeconomic needs are ways to stabilize troubled societies and help them move forward.

My country is seriously engaged in combating the rise of non-State actors in many ways. Kazakhstan ratified the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in July 2011, and, accordingly, soon thereafter adopted its national children's rights act. Subsequently, it introduced legal measures to prohibit the enlistment of persons under the age of 18 years, or their use as mercenaries. The criminal code of Kazakhstan provides for initiating proceedings in such cases. The emphasis is also on interreligious and inter-ethnic education aimed at forming a national identity of shared human values of tolerance in a global civilization, and thus preventing terrorism and religious extremism. Kazakhstan is taking measures to protect Afghan child refugees and afford them the help they need with education and health care.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan joins the international community in ensuring overall child security in times of conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Albania.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania) (*spoke in French*): Albania welcomes the opportunity to participate in this important public debate on children and armed conflict. I would like to thank you, Sir, for the very detailed concept note (S/2015/168, annex) that was circulated in advance of this debate.

Albania associates itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. However, I will make a few comments in my national capacity.

We fully agree with your assessment, Sir, that the year 2014 was, unfortunately, the bleakest year for children, and that this trend is very sadly confirmed for the current year as well. This was indicated recently by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in her latest report submitted to the Human Rights Council in Geneva during the twenty-eighth session.

The conclusions of that report leave no room for doubt. The year 2014, characterized by the intensification and recurrence of conflicts, served to highlight the significant vulnerability of children to the devastating effects of war. In armed conflict zones, children have been the victims of the worst violations. They were kidnapped, executed or mutilated, sexually abused, recruited and forced to commit atrocities, sometimes even against other children. As the report points out, the most tragic aspect is that what has been seen, documented or verified, is only a small part of violations against children.

(*spoke in English*)

We reiterate our deep concern regarding the atrocities perpetrated by extremist non-State armed groups, in particular against children belonging to religious and ethnic minorities. An unprecedented mixture of barbaric medieval behaviour with modern-day propaganda by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and its affiliates has revealed some of the most unspeakable crimes and the most vicious acts and behaviours, including, as reported, the beheading of children and the filming of acts of rape against girls in Iraq. Most worrying is the fact that terror groups are now focusing their recruitment efforts on children, posting videos of little boys firing weapons almost as big as they are in order to breed the next terrorist generation.

We welcome the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, including her recent recommendations on the four areas in which the work of the Human Rights Council can improve the protection of children. As a Human Rights Council member, Albania remains committed to incorporating, as a matter of priority, the violations and the specific needs of children affected by armed conflict into the Council's work and mechanisms.

We reiterate our support for the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, jointly initiated with UNICEF, which seeks to put an end to the recruitment and use of children by national armed forces in conflict by 2016, and we appreciate the progress achieved during the first year of the campaign. In that context, we welcome the confirmation, on 1 December 2014, of the decision by the International Criminal Court Appeals Chamber against the first individual to be convicted of committing war crimes consisting of enlisting and conscripting children. It represents a milestone in ensuring accountability and ending impunity.

We expect the Security Council to be at the forefront in addressing violations against children everywhere. Nothing, no rule, no procedural aspect, no kind of interest, could explain an absence of swift and resolute action by the Council in such situations. We have said it before, and we reiterate it again: the use of veto in such cases is simply the abuse of veto. Albania reiterates its unwavering support for the French proposal and the efforts of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group for a code of conduct to refrain from the use of the veto in situations of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, situations that always first and foremost affect the children.

In conclusion, let me remind the Council that this year we will celebrate the twenty-sixth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the first legally binding instrument to take a holistic approach to human rights and to recognize children as rights holders. The Convention is the most ratified treaty in human history, but still, a lot more needs to be done to keep children safe and removed from war atrocities.

Given its importance in the protection of children in armed conflict, Albania has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and we are committed to its full implementation. We call on countries that have already signed the Protocol to ratify it, but also on all other countries to consider being part of this important instrument for the rights of the child.

Finally, we think that the upcoming discussion on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, under the Malaysian presidency in June 2015 should serve as an opportunity to build and sustain momentum towards the universal ratification and acceptance of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Zehnder (Switzerland): Switzerland would like to thank the French presidency for organizing this open debate. My country particularly commends the specific focus on child victims of armed groups.

Like States, armed groups, as parties to armed conflicts, are required to respect international humanitarian law. They are responsible for taking the necessary measures to prevent the recruitment of children and to ensure that children are adequately protected. Such actors are often unaware of their obligations, and direct or indirect contact with them is therefore essential. In certain conditions and according to specific criteria, Switzerland is convinced that dialogue with armed groups is possible and can lead to concrete results. My country appreciates the important work being carried out by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and encourages her efforts to raise the awareness of States and armed groups with respect to their commitment to the protection of children. Switzerland calls on Member States and all other actors in a position to provide access to United Nations personnel and ensure their safety to undertake a dialogue on the establishment and implementation of action plans, as well their subsequent monitoring.

Switzerland supports the organization known as Geneva Call, which aims to encourage armed groups to respect their obligations. To that end, the organization relies on dialogue, consciousness-raising and training. Geneva Call has also adopted an innovative mechanism known as the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflicts, which offers armed groups the possibility to commit to a signed declaration to respect a specific set of standards. Switzerland also supports the International Committee

for the Red Cross, the organization that also upholds international humanitarian law and that plays an active role in the protection of children, as for example through its visits to detention centres with a particular focus on children.

Switzerland is concerned by the indoctrination of children as well as by the scale of the acts of violence and the atrocities committed against them by armed groups over the past months. In response to that development, a good number of States have taken measures to combat terrorism that seek at the same time to protect children. However, some of those measures criminalize all humanitarian action or any contact established to humanitarian ends with armed groups considered extremist. Children in areas controlled by such groups therefore directly suffer the horrific consequences of those measures, and children deemed to have presumed or real links with armed groups are placed in detention.

Switzerland commends the work of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack and welcomes the conclusion of the Lucens Guidelines. The Guidelines provide a solid basis for the prevention of the use of schools and universities by armed forces and armed groups during armed conflicts. There is an urgent need for us to mobilize in order to better enforce international law and to put an end to serious violations of the rights of children.

The Security Council must strengthen measures regarding the protection of children as part of mission mandates. It is also essential to train peacekeeping staff in the issues related to the protection of children and to write specific provisions into the operational procedures adopted as well as into the rules of engagement. Switzerland welcomes the programme of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) that provides appropriate training for soldiers prior to their deployment. The programme should be compulsory for all troop-contributing countries. Switzerland will contribute funds to evaluate the impact of deploying child protection advisors within the framework of DPKO missions.

In conclusion, Switzerland appreciates the initiative of the French presidency to summarize in a non-paper the specific operational idees proposed by Member States and welcomes the Security Council's intention to pursue this discussion in the context of the next open debate on children and armed conflict in June. Switzerland will submit its proposals in writing.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mrs. Gatto (Italy) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing this open debate with a focus on children and armed conflict.

(*spoke in English*)

This is a very timely subject. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the briefers and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, for their contributions.

My country continues to strongly support the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and the efforts of the Special Representative's Office to engage with 12 armed non-State actors.

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Armed conflicts have evolved in nature in recent years. We are witnessing the significant involvement of non-State armed actors along with the radicalization of conflicts. Children are among those who suffer most from the consequences of armed conflict. They are recruited as soldiers, their right to education is often denied and their lives are subject to a greater risk of neglect, exploitation, trafficking, sexual violence and harmful practices such as forced marriage. Girls and boys are also increasingly the victims of abductions. Substantial progress has been achieved. Yet as the current news, even the most recent, reminds us, that plague remains. We cannot let our guard down. We therefore welcome France's invitation to make concrete suggestions to better prevent and respond to that scourge, and would like to contribute with five proposals.

First, accountability at the national and international level would insure that perpetrators are brought to justice. For that reason, as another representative said earlier, the Security Council might consider expanding resolution 1612 (2005) by recognizing abduction in armed conflict as a listing criterion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report. Abduction has long been used as a tactic by non-State armed groups, and is often the precursor to other grave violations. By calling for the immediate and unconditional release of children held captive by armed groups, we believe

that it is time for the Security Council to emphasize its condemnation of that practice.

Secondly, with respect to peacekeeping mandates, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council during the 2007-2008 period, Italy strongly supported the inclusion of specific provisions on the protection of children in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations, which has today become a standard practice. Mandates due for renewal could be thoroughly evaluated with a view to considering the degree of protection given to children and to strengthening the mandate accordingly.

Thirdly, with regard to training, since its inception, Italy has strongly supported the work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop a systematic training programme on child protection for peacekeeping personnel. Targeted predeployment training for United Nations personnel on children in armed conflict could now be fully scaled up and become a standard practice for the United Nations, in coordination with regional organizations.

Fourthly, concerning access to humanitarian relief, if an armed non-State actor proves willing to engage constructively on that matter with the United Nations, there should be no obstruction to such engagement. United Nations peacekeeping mandates could encompass that priority through stricter and more consistent norms.

Lastly, with respect to the reintegration of children into their communities, if children are not properly cared for after their release, they may face the risk of being re-recruited, or may be willing to join the armed groups again. To that end, United Nations peacebuilding mandates should aim at involving local communities through joint outreach programmes and peer-to-peer initiatives.

Ending abuses by persistent perpetrators does not altogether end impunity. While Italy holds the position of Vice-President of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, we believe that the International Criminal Court has an essential role to play in holding persistent perpetrators accountable for their crimes. In that regard, we also welcome the recent sentencing of rebel leader Thomas Lubanga Dyilo for war crimes, including the conscription of children.

Let me conclude by underscoring that prevention is crucial. It is not only a moral responsibility, but also a strategic investment in our future. Italy backs development cooperation projects to support children in humanitarian emergencies in many regions. From that experience we have learned that preventing this scourge is possible by empowering youth through the rule of law and education and through economic and civil reconstruction processes. Let us work on developing comprehensive United Nations strategies in this field as well.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank France for organizing this public debate on the plight of children in armed conflict and all those who have taken the floor and shed light on the situation, in particular Mr. Junior Nzita, a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Luxembourg associates itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

As it has been recalled, in 2014 15 million children were directly affected by conflicts, including in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Ukraine, to cite only some examples. They were subjected to irreparable violence and trauma, which not only hurts each child on an individual basis, but which undermines the strength of whole societies, to quote the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF.

The "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which was launched one year ago by Special Representative Leila Zerrougui in collaboration with UNICEF, plays a key role in encouraging Governments to put an end to the recruitment and use of children by armed forces in conflict by 2016. I would like to pay tribute to the progress that has been made because of the campaign, which we will continue to support financially. But Governments are not the only ones that recruit children for combat. On the contrary, the vast majority of the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2014/339) are non-State actors.

Despite the undeniable progress that has been made and the conclusion of action plans with armed groups, for example in Nepal and Sri Lanka, the current situation requires more determined action. The abuses committed against civilians, and children in particular, by Daesh in Iraq and Syria and by Boko Haram in Nigeria have reached unprecedented levels of violence. Given the modus operandi of these groups, in particular with regard to the abduction of children, it is time to take further action. In our view, the addition of a new

trigger aimed at non-State armed groups guilty of child abduction would be an appropriate response by the international community.

I would like to mention four other specific measures aimed at better protecting children against violations and abuses committed by non-State actors.

First, States should be encouraged to facilitate the access of the United Nations to armed groups in order to put an end to the violations perpetrated by such groups, particularly by concluding action plans.

Secondly, armed groups should be informed of their obligations under international humanitarian law and the relevant information about their situation, including the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, should be brought to their attention.

Thirdly, we must ensure that the protection of children is taken into account in peace negotiations. To that end, mediators must be made aware of the issues and must have clear guidelines. The release of children involved with armed groups and their reintegration must be included in all the relevant peace agreements.

Fourthly, the collection of information on armed groups should be improved in order to design tailored incentives that are adapted to the military structure, size, mode of operation and other characteristics of the armed groups.

Moreover, national armed forces and forces acting under international mandates should be better equipped in order to better incorporate the protection of children in their fight against armed groups. Three measures would be useful in the context of the expansion of resolution 2143 (2014): first, the development of standard procedures for the transfer of children associated with armed groups to child protection actors; secondly, ensuring that the rules of military engagement incorporate provisions for the protection of children, including children associated with armed groups; and, thirdly, requiring specific operational training on child protection in accordance with the training materials developed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

I would like to conclude by recalling the particular importance we attach to resolution 2143 (2014), adopted by the Council a year ago. It is the imperative to prevent the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes and to prevent attacks against schools. In that respect, Luxembourg fully supports the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We take this opportunity to encourage all Member States to do the same.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Kassé (Mali) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, Mr. President, to begin by expressing my country's satisfaction at seeing your great country, France, preside over the work of the Security Council for the month of March. At the same time, I commend the initiative of convening this open debate on children and armed conflict, including child victims of non-State armed groups. In the same vein, I would also like to congratulate the delegation of the People's Republic of China for its outstanding leadership of the Council's work over the past month. I congratulate the Secretary-General for his briefing and take this opportunity to reiterate my Government's gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her constant commitment to protecting children's rights in countries in situations of armed conflict. Lastly, I thank Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita for their briefings.

It should be recalled that, on 20 November 1989 here in New York, Mali, co-presided over the special session of the General Assembly at the end of which the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Mali signed the Convention on 26 January 1990 and deposited its instrument of ratification on 20 September of the same year. Since that time, all succeeding Governments have implemented bold reforms, including concrete action to protect and promote the rights of children throughout the country, including in the northern regions of Mali. Those actions, it must be recalled, were focused on several areas, including education, health, the fight against female genital mutilation, early marriage, begging, trafficking and the exploitation of children.

While children of Mali have been the subject of all those programmes and initiatives, their fate has reached a dramatic turning point following the unleashing of the rebellion and occupation of the northern parts of our territory by terrorist armed groups. According to the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/267) on children and armed conflict in Mali published in April 2014,

> "armed groups operating in the north of the country, including the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb,

> Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, resorted to the most serious human rights violations relating to the recruitment and the large-scale use of children, mutilation, killings, collective and individual rape of women and girls, forced marriages, the deprivation of fundamental freedoms, the destruction of schools and health facilities, the refusal to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid."

Those archaic atrocities have resulted in the massive displacement of women and children to neighbouring States and within the country, jeopardizing the access of thousands of children to education.

The children of Mali, like those elsewhere, are the first victims of the criminal and asymmetrical actions of non-State armed groups. In the light of that situation, the Government of Mali has made a solemn commitment here to act in a manner consistent with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the decisions and recommendations of a number of subregional and international entities, including the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Non-Aligned Movement and the European Union.

In its quest for peace for the benefit of civilian populations and future generations, the Government of Mali has participated in the peace process in good faith. That process began in Algiers on 16 July 2014, and resulted in an agreement for peace and national reconciliation in Mali on 1 March 2015. That document, which was signed by the Government of Mali, the movements of the platform, all members of the international mediation team and France, is the result of eight months of intense efforts by the international community.

In a surprising turn of events, despite the commitment made on 9 June 2014 in Algiers to peacefully resolve the conflict in northern Mali through a comprehensive and final agreement with the Government, despite numerous calls for dialogue launched by the Security Council through its relevant resolutions and statements on the situation in Mali; despite the working visit carried out by the international mediation team on 17 March in Kidal, the Coordination of Azawad Movements unfortunately decided to remain on the sidelines of the Algiers process by refusing to sign the agreement for peace and national reconciliation in Mali. That refusal to sign the document, which was submitted to the parties by the mediation team, is an invitation to armed terrorist groups and narco-jihadist groups to continue to rage in northern Mali and throughout the Sahel region.

Following that refusal, which is also a gesture of defiance to the international community, the delegation of Mali calls on the mediation team to assume its responsibility as guarantor of the peace process. Along the same lines, we call on the members of the Security Council to exert the necessary pressure to bring the armed movements that have not yet done so to initial and sign the agreement as soon as possible.

By initialing the draft agreement, the Government of Mali has once again shown its good faith in the quest for peace, adhering to the compromise proposed by the mediation team, and this in strict compliance with the founding principles of the Republic of Mali and the ideals around which our nation was built. At this stage, I would like to reaffirm that the Government of Mali remains committed to the spirit and the letter of its statement of 18 March 2015, a copy of which was sent to the members of the Security Council.

We are all aware that the signing of the final and comprehensive peace agreement in Mali will not only mark an important step in the process to protect child victims of armed conflict and to ensure their social reintegration, but also to bring the perpetrators of crimes committed against children before the appropriate judicial authorities. Similarly, the signing of the agreement will enable the Government of Mali to continue, undisturbed, its efforts to promote and protect the rights of children, who should have their rightful place within the family, at school and playgrounds, and not in an armed group or on a battlefield.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Mali to scrupulously comply with its international obligations, including international legal instruments and the relevant Security Council resolutions on the protection and development of children. They represent the most vulnerable segment of society, but also the hope and future of the country.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Marn (Slovenia): I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing this timely debate. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and other speakers for their briefings.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and that to be delivered on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Slovenia joins others in condemning the grave violations committed against children during armed conflict by armed non-State actors, including heinous acts by Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and by Boko Haram in Nigeria and neighbouring States. Children should not be recruited as soldiers, used as suicide bombers, abducted, trafficked or sold for use in hostilities, forcibly married or used as sex slaves. They should not be deliberate targets of killing or maiming caused by non-exploded landmines or remnants of war, rape or other forms of sexual violence. All those acts cause irreparable damage to the lives of the children affected, as well as to their families, and have long-term consequences for the communities.

Slovenia believes that abductions are one of the grave violations committed against children in armed conflict, and recent cases of abduction are proof that Council action is required. In that respect, we call on the Council to set abductions as a trigger for the listing of parties in the annexes of the Secretary-General's relevant annual reports.

Last year we witnessed an increased number of attacks and the use of schools by armed non-state actors, such as attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Boko Haram in Nigeria. In that regard, we would like to recall resolution 2134 (2014) and to call on all non-State armed groups to respect the civilian character of schools in accordance with international humanitarian law. We call on the Security Council and its Working Group to use all the tools at their disposal to address the impact of acts of armed non-State actors on children in situations of armed conflict and to increase pressure on persistent perpetrators to comply with international standards.

To demonstrate that grave violations against children in armed conflict are inadmissible, the perpetrators of such crimes, including armed non-State actors, must be held accountable through the national justice system or, when applicable, through international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). The confirmation by the ICC Appeals Chamber of the verdict and the sentence against Thomas Lubanga in December 2014 was an important step in the fight against impunity.

Armed non-State actors represent the vast majority of parties listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's latest annual report (S/2014/339) on children and armed conflict, and most of them are persistent perpetrators. We welcome the efforts by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to negotiate and help implement action plans with 12 such actors. At the same time, we encourage the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to develop strategies for outreach to those parties, and urge all the countries concerned to enable access to armed non-State actors. We also see the merit in having non-State actors sign a deed of commitment for the protection of children from the effect of armed conflict, and commend the efforts of those who have already done so.

Let me also use this opportunity to underline the importance of rehabilitating children. Slovenia has been supporting different initiatives in that respect. Most recently, we supported a biannual regional project to reduce the vulnerability of Syrian refugees, in particular children and youth, to the negative consequences of mines and other remnants of war. That project, entitled "Tomorrow is Ours", is carried out by the International Trust Fund Enhancing Human Security in Jordan and Lebanon. The project also offers psychosocial support and education to Syrian children in order to help them overcome their trauma, improve their psychosocial well-being and develop more solid foundations for the future.

In conclusion, let me stress that, since the groundbreaking Machel report almost 20 years ago (see A/51/306), the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict 15 years ago and the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) 10 years ago, the international community has made enormous progress in lessening the impact of armed conflict on children. We must persist in those efforts, as we also face new challenges on the children in armed conflict agenda.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the French presidency of the Council for organizing this debate. I also welcome the presence among us today of Ms. Leila Zerrougui,

Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the representatives of UNICEF and civil society.

(*spoke in English*)

Atrocities committed against children are an affront to our common humanity. They deprive children of a future, and they can have catastrophic long-term consequences for both the victims and their communities. Recent conflicts have seen unimaginable outrages committed against children. We are appalled by the mass abductions of children by non-State actors. Of particular note are the abductions by Boko Haram of 276 schoolgirls in Nigeria in April 2014; the abduction of 153 Kurdish boys from Ain al-Arab in Syria in May 2014 by the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS); the attack by the Taliban on a school in Peshawar during which 132 children were killed in December 2014; and the abduction of hundreds of Yezidi children by ISIS in western Iraq in July 2014.

We call for the immediate release of all of those abducted children without delay. We call once again on the Security Council to make the abduction of children a criteria for being listed in the annexex to all the relevant reports of the Secretary-General.

(*spoke in French*)

The protection of children from violence in all forms and in all settings is crucial. Schools should be a safe place where children can learn. Education is an effective tool for reducing their vulnerability. We are increasingly seeing schools used as shields and hiding places for combatants, and thus children are forced into the line of fire. Canada strongly condemns the unlawful targeting of education facilities. We call on all parties to armed conflict to refrain from using schools as bases, barracks, weapons caches or detention centres.

We are also especially concerned with the safety of girls in situations of armed conflict, where they face particular risks and abuses. All too often they become the victims of rape, sexual violence and sexual exploitation. They are used as slaves, including sex slaves, and face abuses such as child, early and forced marriage. We therefore call for special and dedicated attention to the protection of girls.

(*spoke in English*)

In seeking justice for abuses against children, we must not lose sight of the victims themselves. Effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for children are absolutely crucial. Recent reports of the indoctrination of children by non-State actors are particularly troubling, and it is essential that community-based programmes receive timely, sustained and adequate resources and funding. The international community must work together to ensure the successful reintegration of these children.

Similarly, more must also be done to help girls who have survived violence, including sexual violence. We must help them recover and reintegrate into their communities, so that their trauma is not compounded by social stigma. In doing so, we must not unwittingly trap survivors in the role of victims. Rather, we must help them to play out their lives as active and empowered members of their communities.

(*spoke in French*)

When children suffer these unspeakable abuses, it tears apart their families and communities. In addition to the social stigma that can arise in cases of sexual violence, children may also be forced to take part in violence against their family members and neighbours. This brings a new and horrifying level of complexity to reintegration. If it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to recover from atrocity.

(*spoke in English*)

We are increasingly seeing a trend of armed non-State actors seeking to recruit children across borders. Recalling resolution 2178 (2014), we call upon Member States to cooperate to prevent the radicalization, recruitment, equipping and cross-border transit of children to join such groups.

We call on those armed non-State actors listed in the annex to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict (S/2014/339) to adopt and implement action plans committing themselves to end grave violations against children. We commend the efforts undertaken by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to negotiate and help implement action plans with 12 armed non-State groups in recent years.

(*spoke in French*)

There is also a role for every State Member of the United Nations to play. We encourage all Member States to employ what influence is at their disposal, including through dialogue, law enforcement and economic means, to pressure non-State actors to immediately cease grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

(spoke in English)

Canada is committed to ensuring that the rights of children are protected. I can assure the Council that we will continue to fight against the unspeakable atrocities that threaten the safety, dignity and lives of girls and boys in situations of armed conflict in places such as Iraq, Syria and many others in corners of our world.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Vollmer (Austria): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional network composed of Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand and my own country, Austria, and South Africa as an observer. The Human Security Network is an informal group of States that advocates a people-centred, holistic approach to human security, complementing the more traditional understanding of national and international security.

Let me first of all thank today's briefers for their comprehensive statements. I would also like to thank the French presidency for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict, a topic that has long been a priority for the Network. We welcome the particular focus of the debate today, since the overwhelming majority of parties listed in the Secretary-General's most recent annual report on children in armed conflict (S/2014/339) are non-State armed groups.

In order to ensure that perpetrators, including non-State armed groups, national armed forces and peacekeepers who commit grave violations against children, are brought to justice, we need to take concrete measures. We call for more efforts to address impunity and to investigate, prosecute and punish all those who commit grave violations against children. In particular, boys and girls continue to be affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence during armed conflict. National justice systems, subregional and regional cooperation and the International Criminal Court have an important role to play in this regard. The Network stresses that the presence of local female police officers and women peacekeepers can encourage victims to come forward to report such crimes.

The signing of action plans must be facilitated, and efforts towards their implementation must be made. The number of action plans concluded with non-State armed groups must increase further. For this purpose, the United Nations and concerned Governments should cooperate closely. Furthermore, child protection provisions have to be integrated into peace talks and agreements.

Every child should have access to education, including in regions of armed conflict. In that context, the Network reiterates the importance of resolution 2143 (2014). Recent events have shown the timeliness of a focus on protecting schools against attacks and avoiding their military use. The Network welcomes the draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and efforts to disseminate and promote their implementation. Furthermore, we take note with interest of the ongoing consultations on the so-called Safe Schools Declaration to provide a broader framework for the Guidelines.

The Human Security Network calls for the inclusion of specific child protection provisions in peacekeeping mission mandates. Moreover, soldiers, police officers and civilians who participate in United Nations and other international peacekeeping missions should receive special training in child protection and children's rights. The Network encourages the United Nations and its Member States to work together to build this capacity further.

Monitoring on the ground and accurate and timely reporting can be crucial to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for violations committed against children in armed conflict. Peacekeepers can make an important contribution by effectively applying the monitoring and reporting mechanisms established in accordance with resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), in situations where parties to conflict have been listed in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

The Network condemns the extremely worrying mass abductions of children. Girls are particularly at risk of abduction and recruitment by armed groups for sexual purposes and forced marriages. Furthermore, the Network strongly condemns the recruitment of children by armed forces, supports the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and children affected by war, and reiterates its commitment to the United Nations "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched one year ago. Moreover, the Network encourages States that have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We further commend the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Malaysia. In the year of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), we encourage the Working Group to make full use of its tool box in order to move the agenda forward in significant ways. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, and all the other actors involved for implementing the mandate for the protection of children in armed conflict and ensuring an effective and thorough monitoring and reporting mechanism.

Finally, the Human Security Network looks forward to the second open debate dedicated to children and armed conflict, in June.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): My delegation warmly welcomes the focus of this debate on armed non-State actors. We thank the briefers. We particularly appreciate the comments made by those who have suggested concrete measures to make progress on the issue.

In that regard, I would like to add three points from my delegation's perspective. The first point concerns abductions. Mass abductions of children are becoming ever more frequent. We have seen horrific cases in recent times, including by Boko Haram in Nigeria and by Daesh in Syria and Iraq. We believe that the Security Council should recognize abduction as grounds for listing conflict parties in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict. In fact, we believe that such action is overdue.

Secondly, we support the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to negotiate and help to implement action plans directly with armed non-State actors. We believe that such direct engagement is crucial. In this Chamber, we often call on conflict parties to respect international human rights law and on rebel groups not to use schools for military activities. But we all know, of course, that they are not listening to the webcast of this event or reading the press release the day after. Without the direct engagement with those actors, many of the efforts we undertake will prove meaningless. We therefore urge concerned Governments to fully support such engagement. We are also very grateful for the direct engagement undertaken by non-governmental organizations, which often have a different way of accessing those groups that is extremely crucial, from our perspective.

My third point underlines the important role of justice mechanisms in deterring violations against children; there two aspects to this issue.

The first is that perpetrators must be made aware that their actions are illegal. That does not always go without saying, as seen in the case of the conscription of child soldiers. In the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Center for Transitional Justice documented the educational impact of the International Criminal Court (ICC) trial against Thomas Lubanga on other rebels in the field.

Secondly, perpetrators must be made aware that they can be prosecuted. That requires either a functioning national judicial system or the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Referral by the Security Council may sometimes be necessary to establish jurisdiction. Furthermore, third States could and should exercise jurisdiction, either based on the nationality of the perpetrator, which is becoming increasingly relevant as ever greater numbers of fighters are traveling to conflict zones, on the basis of universal jurisdiction, which is well established with respect to war crimes.

I would like to particularly emphasize the deterrent effect of the International Criminal Court, which is increasingly being documented. Liechtenstein had the great pleasure of co-hosting a recent event at the International Peace Institute, where a study undertaken by Harvard and Texas A&M Universities was presented. The study's main result was that, under certain conditions, the ICC can, indeed, prevent crimes and have an impact on the people on the ground. It does so through prosecutorial deterrence, by signaling to perpetrators that they could be subject to indictment, trial and jail sentences, as well as through social deterrence.

There are indirect and extralegal consequences to the activities of the ICC. It can lead to perpetrators and potential perpetrators being shunned by their communities, or being subjected to informal sanctions and other measures. At our even, one example cited was that, in the Central African Republic, rebel commanders told Human Rights Watch researchers that they did not want to end up before the ICC, and they offered to demobilize child soldiers. And children were, in fact, demobilized.

In sum, we believe that justice mechanisms can be a great ally to the Security Council in its fight to protect children in armed conflict. We call on the Security Council to make better and more consistent use of that important tool.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate on children and armed conflict. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her briefing, and the others for their briefings, as well as the United Nations agencies supporting Palestinian children, including UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

As the Security Council considers the situation of children in armed conflict around the world, we appeal to the Council not to forget Palestinian children, who are suffering extreme hardship, shocking acts of aggression, oppression and gross human rights violations due to the Israeli occupation and the persistence of that conflict for nearly 70 years. Israel, the occupying Power, is in continuous, grave breach of international law, including, inter alia, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council resolutions. It is without a doubt that Israel systematically fulfils three of the six criteria used to assess grave violations against children.

First, Israeli occupying forces engage in a pattern of killing and maiming children. The occupying Power cynically claims that its military strikes are "conducted in a precise and surgical manner", yet in last summer's Israeli war on the Gaza Strip at least 540 Palestinian children were killed, constituting 20 per cent of the civilian casualties. Thousands more children were injured and disabled. Those crimes were not just a one-time occurrence. Israel's previous assaults on occupied Gaza caused a high proportion of child casualties, in addition to the incessant attacks on children in the occupied West Bank by the occupying forces and extremist settlers, with almost 1,200 injured in the year of 2014 alone.

Secondly, the occupying Power deliberately targets schools and hospitals. During the war on Gaza, the Israeli Government repeatedly received the precise locations of hospitals, medical centres and schools, including those where it was fully aware that families had been sheltering. Yet the occupying Power attacked and damaged 279 schools and 75 health centres and hospitals, in addition to the thousands of civilian homes it targeted and destroyed. Again, these attacks were not just a one-time occurrence, as the occupying Power has systematically destroyed Palestinian homes and civilian properties in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, rendering thousands upon thousands of families homeless, forcibly displacing them and leaving children in a state of perpetual insecurity and trauma.

Thirdly, Israel denies humanitarian access to the entire occupied Palestinian people, endangering the well-being and survival of Palestinian children. Since 2007, Israel has subjected the more than 1.8 million civilians in Gaza to an illegal, immoral blockade. The situation has left Gaza devastated and dependent on aid and has completely debilitated its economy and infrastructure, including water networks, with 90 per cent of water being unfit for humans. At this rate, without a lifting of the Israeli blockade or the delivery of assistance at the scope and scale needed, Gaza's reconstruction will take over 100 years, a deplorable situation inconsistent with international humanitarian law. Children — 52 per cent of the population — are suffering disproportionately.

Israeli policies, approved at the highest levels, are not only gross attacks against children, but are systematic violations of international law tantamount to war crimes. Israel's deliberate oppression of Palestinian children has no limits; not a day goes by in which children's rights are not violated. In that regard, I must also draw attention to the Israeli practice of detaining Palestinian children, some as young as eight years old. The Israeli military court is the world's first and only juvenile military court, and since 2000 an estimated 10,000 children have been detained and prosecuted there. Their numbers are growing. Over the past three years, child detentions have increased by 87 per cent. In detention, children are blindfolded, strip-searched and subjected to physical and verbal abuse and solitary confinement that traumatizes them. They endure cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment amounting to torture.

The occupying Power's collective punishment and abuse of Palestinian children are also a source of ongoing trauma and suffering. In Gaza alone, six

months after Israel's latest attack, Palestinian children continue to suffer from hunger, fear, deprivation and isolation. More than 400,000 children in Gaza are in urgent need of psychosocial support. We commend United Nations agencies, in particular UNICEF and UNRWA, for their tireless efforts aimed at assisting those children in need.

It is clear that the crimes committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against children are a symptom of a wider problem — a complete lack of accountability. We have continued to repeat that the international community's unwillingness to enforce international law when it comes to Israel only fuels its lawlessness and the culture of impunity among the occupying forces. In this regard, we call on the international community, including the Security Council, to take three immediate steps to end this cycle of impunity and protect Palestinian children.

First, we call on the Secretary-General to add the Israeli occupying forces to the United Nations global list of parties that consistently commit grave violations against children. We urge Member States to join us in this call. The evidence is abundant. The criteria are to be assessed objectively. Any such assessment will lead to the conclusion that the Israeli occupying forces must be listed. Failure to do so implies politicization of the mechanism, which undermines its credibility, and if credibility is undermined for one case, it is undermined for all cases.

Secondly, the international community should demand the immediate and permanent release of all children from Israeli captivity. There can be no justification for detention and abuse of children.

Finally, assistance must flow into Gaza, and the international community should do whatever it takes to ensure Israeli compliance with international law, including by lifting its illegal blockade. This is imperative for a real change in the tragic situation of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation to come to pass.

The plight of Palestinian children cannot be divorced from the wider political context. Only an independent State of Palestine where the Palestinian people can live in freedom and dignity will bring permanent relief and lasting peace and security to our children. The Palestinian leadership remains committed to the two-State solution. However, the Israeli Prime Minister has clearly made his opposition known through words and actions. In that regard, it is incumbent on the international community to apply the pressure required to end Israel's occupation that began in 1967 and bring the Israeli side into compliance with international law. In the meantime, the Palestinian leadership will continue to pursue accountability for the Palestinian people, including children, through every available legitimate avenue, including the International Criminal Court.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Ružička (Slovakia): I thank the French presidency for organizing today's debate and all the briefers for their presentations earlier. I would like to align myself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union.

I would like to mention some numbers: 2 million, 6 million, 300 million, 1 billion. These are unbelievable numbers. One may ask what connection these numbers have with today's debate. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, at least 2 million children have died in the past decade as a result of wars. Many have been targeted as non-combatants or killed in action as soldiers. Some 6 million have been disabled or seriously injured, with many more suffering from disease, malnutrition or sexual violence. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department has stated that conflict-affected areas are home to 1 billion children — 1 billion — of whom 300 million are under the age of five.

In recent decades, the proportion of civilian casualties in armed conflicts has increased dramatically and is now estimated at more than 90 per cent. About half of these victims are children. We join the Security Council in its strong condemnation of ongoing violence against civilian populations, notably women and children. Since 2009, we have witnessed a deplorable string of violence and abuse of children. The immediate cessation of Boko Haram's hostilities and abuses, which are now shockingly spreading outside Nigeria and brutally affecting neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger, is absolutely necessary, together with the unconditional release of all abducted civilians and children, including the 276 schoolgirls abducted in Chibok, Borno State in April 2014.

We hear statements about children being killed, maimed, abducted, sexually abused, recruited and used by armed forces. Victims of such crimes lack adequate

assistance and, in most cases, the perpetrators remain unpunished. Many red lines have been crossed. There are no words to describe the suffering of these children. In fact, no words are necessary; action must be taken. In that regard, the role of the International Criminal Court is indispensable, and the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, should further examine ways to assist the Court in fulfilling its mandate. Accountability is a crucial element, and we have to find ways to better exploit mechanisms designed to enforce it.

But there is one question that bothers me very much. Why are young people affected by and attracted to radicalism? We see many young people turning their sympathies to radical movements regardless of their social background. What are we doing wrong? Perhaps a safe home, safety, education and prospects for living in a stable society are the areas we should concentrate on when speaking about a better future for children who survive armed conflict.

With regard to safety and security, in the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, special emphasis is given to attacks on schools and hospitals. Schools and hospitals should create safe heavens, and not serve as targets.

Education is another key word. In the Millennium Development Goals, the world community set a deadline of 2015 for universal primary education and for the elimination of gender disparities at all levels of education. But we have to go much farther.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that there will be a light at the end of a tunnel. In March 2014, a joint initiative "Children, Not Soldiers" was launched by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, with the aim of ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflicts by 2016. As the Special Representative Leila Zerrougui has assessed, in that campaign's first year progress has been steady. The campaign has received broad support and achieved results that are making a difference in children's lives. Slovakia applauds and fully supports it.

However, the campaign's first year has also shown that more can be done. The international community is obliged to assist the States affected to re-establish their entire institutional system, but most importantly to update and reform so that all citizens may feel secure, free and with a promising future. Emphasis will have to be put on complete reconstruction and transformation of societies, including deep, conceptual and meaningful reform of their armed forces, law enforcement bodies and the entire security sector. Violence against any child now will negatively and irreversibly affect at least the next two generations. We should and must take action to avoid this fat for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Phillippines.

Ms. Ponce (Philippines): The Philippines aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

We thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to share concrete proposals on how to prevent and respond to violations committed by non-State armed groups against children, in particular in relation to peace processes.

As Council members may know, the Philippine Government concluded peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and signed, in March 2014, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. Subsequently, a Transition Commission, composed of MILF and Government representatives and led by MILF, was tasked to draft a basic Bangsamoro law, intended to be the legal framework and governing law of the new Bangsamoro entity and territory. This draft law is now under consideration by our Congress and Senate.

Recognizing that the welfare of children is integral to any peace process, this basic law mandates the Bangsamoro Government to uphold and protect the fundamental rights of children and to establish special development programmes and laws for the young people of the Bangsamoro. It further provides that children, especially orphans of tender age, shall be protected from abuse, exploitation or discrimination.

In negotiating with MILF, our approach was always based on trust, good faith and acknowledgement of the existence of legitimate grievances. This approach necessarily anchored a holistic approach that meant pursuing not just a political settlement, but also a comprehensive social welfare programme — the Sajahatra Bangsamoro — covering health, education and livelihood, and an economic development plan, both to address the root causes of armed conflict. This

approach allowed us to build trust, which was essential for MILF to conclude in 2009 an action plan with the United Nations to eliminate the recruitment and use of children, and to agree to its extension in April 2013.

The action plan continues to be actively implemented by them, with UNICEF Philippines commending MILF for its commitment to addressing this issue. Last December, MILF military commanders and troops underwent a series of orientation sessions on the roles and responsibilities of MILF military leadership and rank and file in preventing and addressing the recruitment and use of children, the sanctions if they did not comply, and the concept of child protection, including the definition of a child under international law, grave violations against children, as well as legal frameworks on child protection. At the end of these sessions, MILF front and base commanders publicly commit to ensuring that no children are associated with their respective commands, and that if there are cases, these children will be separated from the command structure. According to UNICEF, 4,151 Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces elements from 26 base commands and four fronts have received such training.

Our take-away points from our experience are the following. Peace talks and negotiations must incorporate the protection of children and provide a framework for their future from the very start. Equally important, there must be political will and trust on the part of both the Government and the non-State armed group to see the process through. Similarly, military operations must complement the peace process by ensuring that continuous human rights training, particularly on child rights and protection, including the non-use of education facilities, is incorporated into their operational strategies and plans. This encourages similar action on the part of committed non-State armed groups.

Parallel to these is the need to strengthen and clarify the national legal framework for the protection of children. We already had a law — Republic Act 7610, also known as the Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act — that declared children as "zones of peace" who should not be recruited as members of the armed forces or its civilian units, or be used as fighters, couriers or spies. To ensure its clear implementation, our President issued Executive Order 138 establishing a monitoring, reporting and response system composed of civilian, military and police agencies, which meets regularly to verify reports on children who are alleged to be combatants or couriers, guides, spies, medics, cooks or serving in any similar non-combatant capacity.

Subsequently, these agencies signed a memorandum of agreement that provides for the development of an inter-agency action and communication plan on the prevention and response to grave child rights violations; the integration of rights of children in situations of armed conflict into peace negotiations and other peacebuilding programmes and processes; and the development of package services, including education and health services, for children affected by armed conflict si. ations. In addition, a bill providing for the special protection of children in situations of armed conflict and for penalties for violations thereof is also pending before our Senate.

Regional and international partners also play an effective role in monitoring compliance by non-State armed groups of their obligations under peace processes and action plans. Their very presence can build capacity and trust, but it is important that they work in close coordination and with the approval of the Government so that specific and contextualized programmes, including capacity- and confidence-building measures, can be jointly identified and implemented.

The Security Council may also wish to consider a stronger focus on the encouragement that delisting can bring. On the other hand, we also know that not all non-State armed groups share our values or are open to action plans. We have seen the rise of extremist groups that do not seek legitimation by the international order, but rather seek to destroy it. In these cases, efforts must focus on accountability and sanctions, including justice mechanisms. To that end, we need strong domestic laws that criminalize the recruitment and use of children for armed conflict, as well as action by the International Criminal Court.

Finally, documentation can be used not just as a tool to publicize abuses by non-State armed groups, but also to publicize the progress they make. Such positive reinforcement raises the normative and political costs for them. In this regard, it is important that information provided by the website of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict be current and up to date. We note, for instance, that the information on the Philippines on the website is still based on the 2013 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (S/2013/419). It also does not

reflect the fact that MILF has signed an extension to the 2009 action plan, as well as progress made by MILF since 2013. Again, positive reinforcement would help in this regard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Shingiro (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, and your country, France, for organizing this important and timely open debate on the subject of child victims of non-State armed groups, under the agenda item of children and armed conflict. I would also like to congratulate you warmly on your outstanding leadership during France's presidency of the Security Council and for the major role you played in preparing and implementing the Council's field trip to my country, Burundi. I will not forget the substantive, animated and hotly argued debate on the afternoon of 13 March that you moderated during your meeting with political parties and civil-society organizations in Bujumbura. Our democracy emerged from it the wiser.

I would like to thank you for the concept note (S/2015/168, annex) on the subject we are meeting on today that you kindly submitted as material for our discussion. It is concise and well written, researched and directed. My sincere thanks also go to the Secretary-General and the other briefers for joining us this morning in this very interesting debate.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of children worldwide are enrolled, most of them against their will, in Government armed forces or non-State armed groups in conflict. They are thereby exposed to violence both as witnesses and as direct or indirect victims. The impact on their mental health and physical well-being amounts to a violation of their rights as children and their most fundamental human rights, besides the serious threats it poses to peace and development. Similarly, children are being killed, maimed and, depending on the situation, sexually abused, abducted and separated from their families by non-State armed groups every day. This deplorable trend has become a new tactic used without compunction by such armed groups. It is also a way of instilling fear and terror in innocent people, controlling them and forcing them to leave their family homes and become refugees in their own country.

We cannot repeat too often that children are more vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation by armed groups, at a time when conflicts all over the world are becoming more brutal, intense and frequent. While it may be true that Governments around the world have made progress in recognizing that children have no place in their own armies, the recruitment and use of child soldiers continue to be a huge problem, especially among non-State armed groups, and constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law and international standards of human rights. Injured, maimed and traumatized by a war that is not of their choosing, children are left seriously handicapped, marginalized and rejected when they are victims of rape or forced marriage. Deprived of their basic rights, they no longer have access to education, playgrounds, health care or psychological supervision, and they suffer from the absence of affection and other traumas resulting from their time in enforced conscription under unscrupulous non-State armed groups.

The experience of combat can have devastating long-term physical and psychological effects on children, including the loss of limbs, possible exposure to HIV, emotional problems and reprisals or rejection by the families and communities to which these young people wish to return. Such consequences are not only a major problem for communities affected by war but also undermine the international community's efforts to restore peace and promote lasting community recovery after a conflict.

We believe that all children held by armed groups should be released without delay. We cannot wait for peace to return to help children trapped in the turmoil of war. Even a minute longer in the clutches of such groups is an eternity for those children. We must point out that accepting the use of child soldiers in conflict amounts to accepting the destruction of our own future, and we must fight to save it, one child at a time. We must bring them all back, one by one. We firmly believe that investing in ways to keep children away from the front lines, particularly through education and support for a country's economy, is absolutely crucial to their future and that of their communities.

We should recall that schools and students continue to be the targets of deliberate attacks. School facilities are regularly looted or diverted from their primary function in order to be used for military or paramilitary purposes. Such acts deprive children, and the communities whose future and hope they represent, of a fundamental right, the right to an education. The ignorance that is the result of a lack of education

encourages intolerance and perpetuates a cycle of poverty, thus helping to fuel extreme violence.

We would particularly like to highlight the situation of girls directly or indirectly associated with non-State armed groups. Girls are even more vulnerable than their brothers to such groups and are often specifically targeted by them. They therefore naturally need special attention and protection. They are at greater risk of rape or sexual violence, sexual exploitation and even more devastating abuses such as sexual slavery and forced or early. Such tragedies tend to get the entire international community worked up, which is what makes this debate so relevant, but the persistence of the phenomenon has raised questions about the ability of the international community and especially the United Nations to put an end to it. That is why we need to take urgent action to give our children hope. These are our proposals. I do not claim to be reinventing the wheel; some of these measures already exist, but strengthening them could make a difference to our protection of our children.

The first is that we must ensure that the inclusion of specific provisions for protecting children in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and peacebuilding missions becomes a reality. Such measures are effective and successful, especially if child protection advisers are integrated systematically into such operations. However, that must be fully aligned with the child-protection policy of the relevant department. Secondly, when it comes to the injustices that children suffer in the context of armed conflict, especially in relation to education, investing in basic social services, particularly by building schools, health centres and specialist training centres, is an excellent pre-emptive way of protecting children from involvement or exploitation in armed conflict. Thirdly, negotiation and mediation processes should include strengthened provisions for securing child soldiers' release from the clutches of non-State armed groups, with a particular focus on freeing girls who are directly or indirectly associated with armed groups and providing them with support after their release.

Fourthly, I should stress the vital importance of the regional dimension. Local, regional, subregional and continental stakeholders are well placed to play a key role in exerting greater pressure on non-State armed groups in order to put an end to our children's ill treatment. Cooperation must be strengthened between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations that are very close to the areas affected. Building local, regional and continental capacities is also necessary in that regard. This is also true of the process of release and of efforts undertaken at the level of the countries concerned and by the international community to rehabilitate or reintegrate children within their communities of origin.

Fifthly and lastly, we would recall that the protection and assistance provided to children in situations of conflict remain inadequate and poorly distributed. Young people are bearing the consequences of war because Governments have not allocated sufficient importance to their needs or their rights; thus the resources allocated to the settlement of humanitarian crises vary considerably from one country to another. Participants in this meeting may have noted that a child living in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Central African Republic does not receive the same kind of assistance as a child living in Kosovo or Ukraine. This situation must be rectified.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by greeting everyone here and thanking France for the initiative of convening this debate and for the concept note (S/2015/168, annex) that was circulated to guide our discussions. I wish also to convey my congratulations to the delegation of Malaysia and Ambassador Hussein Haniff for their leadership of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I also welcome the Secretary-General's briefing; the presence and briefing of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, who was very eloquent this morning. We also note the presence of high representatives of UNICEF. I am also grateful for the presence of and the experience shared with us by Ms. Bodin and for the commitment of Mr. Nzita to continuing to deepen awareness-raising activities in a global community that is very often violent.

We stress the progress made in the area of prevention and in the promotion of the rights of children through the coordinated actions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with the cooperation of UNICEF and other United Nations system entities. We firmly support the need to agree on the implementation of measures to bring additional pressure to bear on State

and non-State actors that continually violate the rights of children.

In that context, Argentina reiterates the need for greater coordination and consistency between the system for protecting children in armed conflict and the various sanctions regimes, so as to make it possible for us to impose sanctions on those responsible for the most serious violations against children in situations of armed conflict, as well as among the various agencies in the United Nations system and the international organizations working on the ground in implementing plans to protect the rights of children.

As we have heard everyone say throughout this debate, this year will mark the anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), whose adoption was firmly supported by Argentina, which at the time was a non-permanent member of the Security Council. What does this tenth anniversary mean? It means that we have to rethink and re-evaluate the progress made as well as the challenges ahead. Argentina therefore firmly supports the efforts of the Security Council to prevent grave violations of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict.

This commitment has been evident since Argentina became one of the first countries to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It also actively promoted the adoption of each of the resolutions adopted by this body.

But it also seems to me that we have to see where we are individually as States in terms of preventing the violation of the rights of children and adolescents. In our country, we were not born wise and so we have learned and continue to learn about democracy; we are a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to its Optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Furthermore, our democracy has enabled us to make enlistment in my country's military voluntary, at a minimum age of 18.

The worst forms of child labour are unfathomable to my country; what could be the best forms of child labour? We say no to child labour. This is not to give ourselves as an example but to say that whenever there is a situation of armed conflict, be it State or non-State violence, the basis of democracy must consist of the rights recognized by that society and that the authorities abide by and honour.

Protecting children as a human rights focus must continue to be one of our priorities. It is for this reason that we must take it into account, as we see it being done in the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. It is essential, but we also have to do more than just include defenders of the rights of children and adolescents in the various missions; rather, we also have to ensure that we make this a cross-cutting issue in all military, civilian and police components of the forces and actors that take part in peacekeeping missions or special political missions.

Ms. Zerrougui and UNICEF could be additionally supported if we all fully immersed ourselves in the issue of the rights of children and what this means in terms of all those who are involved in peacekeeping on the ground. It is for that reason that it is also important to underscore the importance of the preventive measures that can be adopted by each State, including the establishment and implementation of a legal framework that effectively ensures that children are not and cannot be recruited as soldiers. Therefore, proper birth registrations are very valuable. It may be that some children have been unable to access certain programmes because their age was not recognized, and therefore they have been used as child soldiers.

It is also critical that within the framework of reparation and reintegration programmes, children who have been victims in armed conflict situations be recognized as rights holders and not just as being in need of guardianship, which could deprive them of liberty. They must be recognized as rights holders, not just wards.

Therefore we must avoid any guardianship-focused intervention efforts in the area of the reintegration of children as well as any efforts that might victimize them further. We also stress the need to involve various actors in order to advocate for an end to be put to the involvement of children in armed groups or forces, including human rights activists, teachers, representatives of civil society, family members, health practitioners and religious and community leaders.

We must also combat impunity. In that regard, we rely on the International Criminal Court, which in March 2012, as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France stated this morning, handed down the first decision in which it found Thomas Lubanga Dyilo guilty of war crimes and of recruiting children under 15 years of age to engage in conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Argentina, along with the rest of the international community, is clearly aware of the devastating effects on children,

adolescents and society when children are victims of armed conflicts. In some countries in armed conflict we continue to see children being treated not as victims but as victimizers. That must end. We must help to put an end to that.

Let me close with this comment. This morning, as I was listening intently to the debate, I thought of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. Alice dares to ask the Queen, "What sort of things do you remember best?" The Queen responds naturally, "Oh, things that happened the week after next". The Queen responded naturally. Why am I saying this? Time is always too short for us to prevent; however, there is always time to find military solutions to conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the French presidency for its initiative to organize this very important open debate on children and armed conflict, with particular emphasis on child victims of non-State armed groups.

(*spoke in English*)

As we are about to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, it is deeply shocking that we continue to witness the increasing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, in violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. While we speak today in the Security Council, thousands of children are trapped in armed conflicts all over the world. The deliberate targeting of schools by non-State armed groups, the military use of schools and children being used to carry explosive devices are just some of the most dramatic and horrifying cases. In that regard, we welcome the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which provide concrete and relevant guidance for State and non-State armed groups alike in order to minimize the impact of the military use of schools during armed conflict and reduce their vulnerability to attacks. We must follow all cases in conflicts, especially in the Security Council, to prevent unlawful attacks or the threat of attacks against schools, students and teachers, and to refrain from actions that impede children's right of access to education.

We have noted some encouraging results since the launch in the past year of the United Nations global "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to end the recruitment and use of children in national security forces by the end of 2016. However, despite increasing international efforts to prevent the recruitment of children as combatants, non-State armed groups still constitute the largest majority of perpetrators. Children with low levels of education are often the easiest targets of armed groups. Strengthening educational systems in areas of armed conflict should be one of our utmost priorities.

Girls in particular are under the constant threat of sexual violence and other forms of abuse in conflict situations. They are often deprived of education rights, raped and forced into marriage. Recent barbaric attacks committed by Boko Haram and Daesh, including the kidnapping and selling of girls to terrorist fighters, challenge us all and call for greater coordinated efforts on the part of the international community. We should continue to give specific attention to the protection of girls as they are at greater risk of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuses. Long-standing peace will never be achieved unless we give children the means, skills and education to rebuild a society and institutions torn apart by armed conflict.

Peacekeeping missions have an important role to play in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. It is therefore essential that peacekeeping missions receive the necessary training and requisite resources to effectively perform that critical task. In the context of peacekeeping processes, we strongly believe that specific provisions on the protection of children in armed conflict should be included in all peace negotiations and/or peace agreements. Indeed, for example, the agreements on peace and reconciliation in Mali, signed in Algiers at the beginning of this month, contain specific provisions related to the protection of children from armed conflict and the engagement of communities to support the return and maintenance of children, especially girls, in schools. Such provisions should inspire all ongoing peace processes.

Finally, the increased number and scope of conflicts heighten the importance of cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the regional organizations, especially the African Union. In advocating for the promotion of children and civilians, we commend the tremendous work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General,

Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and her team, who deserve greater and broader support, both politically and in terms of providing her Office with the appropriate means and resources.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict.

Today's debate comes at a time when the evils of using children as soldiers in armed conflicts are not only morally condemned by international consensus, but are also being more vigorously challenged on the ground by various actors around the globe. The increasing use by terrorist groups and other non-State actors of children in armed conflicts demonstrates the urgent need for a new international consensus to confront the crime and to renew the will of the international community to address this scourge.

The year 2014 marked the worst year in the modern era of children being used as soldiers in armed conflicts. In Syria and Iraq alone, we saw more than 10,000 children forced and coerced into becoming child soldiers. While the world searches for solutions, we must take the first step and uniformly affirm that the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts are not only a grave violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, but also an abominable evil to be condemned. That affirmation must not be made by Governments alone, but by all social, political and religious leaders.

The rising influence of non-State actors in regions across the globe has presented the Council and the global community with a growing challenge that requires new tools and new efforts to confront. It is for that reason that the founders of the United Nations gave to the Council the responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. That primordial mission does not and must not allow the international community to turn its back on conflicts in the name of national political interests or geopolitical disagreements with other countries. The responsibility is entrusted to the Council by all Members of the United Nations, so that the foundational notion of governance may be preserved and the responsibility to protect upheld.

That responsibility not only requires national Governments to protect their citizens, but also urges the international community to intervene when national Governments are unable or unwilling to protect their citizens. In the case of non-State actors forcibly recruiting and using child soldiers around the world or committing brutal violence against religious and ethnic minorities, when a State is unwilling or unable to confront such atrocities, it is the responsibility of this body to provide the military means necessary to protect citizens from such inhumane aggressors when all other tools and means are exhausted.

However, solutions to the problem of children in armed conflict cannot be limited to the use of force alone. Rather, the first step requires a renewed commitment to addressing the humanitarian, social, political and economic situations that drive conflicts in which child soldiers are used. In that regard, faith-based communities have played, and continue to play, a vital role in serving the communities impacted, reintegrating former child soldiers and providing a means for dialogue. Faith-based communities also have a responsibility to ensure that those organizations that seek to justify the use of child soldiers in the pursuit of ideological goals driven by distorted understandings of faith and reason are rightly condemned and denounced.

While the international community plays an important role in supporting States in their primary responsibility to protect their citizens, it must also be sure to interact with the local community so that solutions to child soldiers and conflicts can also emerge organically and local ownership be fostered. A solution to the plight of child soldiers also requires sensitivity to finding ways to reintegrate the children back into their own communities. While we witness barbaric acts beyond anyone's imagination also committed by child soldiers, we must remember that these children are exploited and have been manipulated into what they have become. Therefore, while their reintegration into society requires that we recognize that they have committed atrocities, we must at the same time build pathways for counselling and reconciliation with a view to fully accomplishing that reintegration.

The international community already has many of the tools necessary to confront the use of child soldiers. However, it lacks the political will to take the steps needed to address the challenge. As children are abducted from their schools to be enslaved, as children are forced to become suicide bombers and as children

are drugged and tortured into becoming child soldiers, what will it take before we no longer avert our eyes?

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Allow me, at the outset, to thank the French presidency for holding the open debate on children and armed conflict with a particular focus on children as victims of armed non-State groups. It is our obligation to continuously raise our voices against the immense suffering inflicted on children in conflict-prone environments. This holds especially true since child abuse is an ever more prevalent feature of conflicts across the world, despite all preventive and awareness-raising efforts invested by the States Members of the United Nations and the coordinated actions of international organizations.

We very much appreciate the briefings today's by speakers who shared their valuable views on this issue from various perspectives, and have thereby provided us with additional ideas for action.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union, and fully supports the proposals made therein. We wish to especially emphasize our support for the recommendation with regard to further strengthening the role of the International Criminal Court in ensuring accountability for crimes committed by non-State armed groups against children.

Furthermore, Croatia supports all six recommendations for ending and preventing violations of children's rights by non-State armed groups, put forward by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict to the Security Council and Member States.

This year we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the resolution 1612 (2005), through which the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict was established. For more than 20 years, the Security Council has been making serious efforts aimed at preventing and ending the recruitment and abuse of children by non-State armed groups. Yet it is evident that the gap between the commitments and actual practice is still too wide.

In that context, allow me to highlight our strong support to the ongoing campaign "Children, Not Soldiers", jointly launched by UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and aimed at preventing the recruitment and use of children by national security forces. The campaign has substantively contributed to the signing of national action plans with the United Nations and has had a serious impact on improving the situation on the ground in the countries concerned. Such efforts also need to be fully extended to the activities of non-State armed groups, since they accounte for 51 out of the 59 listed parties in the last year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/339). In doing so, we are hopeful that we will witness more examples of success, such as the recent release of several hundred child soldiers in South Sudan.

We are witnessing horrific violence committed by extremist non-State armed groups. The news about abductions and brutal sexual violence committed against children, as well as their active engagement in armed conflicts, are almost becoming commonplace. The abductions of schoolchildren by Boko Haram and other extremist groups represent not only an abhorrent crime, but are used systematically as a tool of war and a strategy for spreading fear. Croatia believes that such mistreatment of children has to be addressed decisively, and supports the inclusion of abduction among the listing criteria in our efforts to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

However, prevention alone is often not enough. We therefore need to invest more efforts into the successful reintegration of children who have been exposed to armed conflict. Developing a United Nations-assisted action plan on this matter for the most affected States would be highly welcome, as well as enhanced regional cooperation in this particular domain. Our involvement also needs to have a special focus throughout on the protection of girls, who are particularly vulnerable in armed conflicts as potential victims of rape, sexual violence, sexual exploitation and early and forced marriage.

In that context, I would also like to refer to the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which Croatia has adopted, as a useful tool for responding to the needs of children affected by the armed conflict. Thos instruments recognize that in situations of armed conflict, States and armed groups are the actors with the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. We believe that it is absolutely crucial to pay continued attention to the specific needs of children during and after armed conflict as part of every effective Government policy.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that Croatia welcomes the intention of the French presidency to further build on this debate by outlining key recommendations, and intends to contribute concrete proposals towards fulfilling our joint responsibility to ensure childhoods free from fear and violence for children all across the globe.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Laram (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. This is an important opportunity to make heard the voice of all children affected by armed conflict. In that regard, I also commend you, Sir, for providing the concept note (S/2015/168, annex). I would be remiss if I failed to express thanks to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, the child-care consultant from Save the Children, as well as Mr. Junior Nzita, who shared his painful experience with us.

This year we are observing the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and the first anniversary of the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers."

Undoubtedly, the terrible cycle of violence affecting children in armed conflict, in which children fall victim to all forms of violence, particularly sexual violence, generates challenges requiring accelerated action and intensified cooperation on the part of Member States in order to hold all perpetrators of those grave violations accountable. For the most part, the perpetrators of those horrendous forms of aggression, which rise to the level of war crimes and grave violations of international humanitarian law, enjoy impunity in the absence of any accountability.

We therefore welcome the Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011), issued by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, concerning attacks on schools and hospitals. This issue is also addressed in resolution 2143 (2014), in which the Council demanded strengthened and more systematic monitoring and reporting of such attacks. The systematic targeting of schools, which should serve exclusively as safe educational institutions, exposes children to danger and deprives them of their basic right to education. In that connection, we renew our call for effective measures to be taken, in accordance with international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to put an immediate stop to such violations that deprive children of their right to the education. Obstacles that prevent children from going to school and deprive them of their legitimate right to education instil a culture of fear and despair rather than foster a culture of life and hope.

It is clear that education provides the skills and knowledge necessary to the growth of children and the building of society, while protecting them from violence and extremism. In that regard, we would highlight Qatar's Education Above All initiative, comprising programmes providing educational opportunities to societies affected by conflict and poverty. These programmes include the Educate a Child initiative, which is being implemented in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and seeks to provide high-quality, basic education to children throughout the world, especially those affected by conflict. We also pay tribute to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, which seeks to prevent schools and universities from being used by military forces during armed conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General on the grave violations committed against children in armed conflict (S/2014/339) sheds light on the role played by the parties to conflict and underscores their responsibility to protect children in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949. According to the report of the Secretary-General, children in the occupied Arab territories and in Syria bear the brunt of the suffering resulting from grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Their suffering will continue, with further losses among the victims, unless the international community takes effective steps to put an end to the violations. Perhaps today's meeting will serve as an additional incentive to intensify efforts in that regard. We are faced with a test of our ability to respect and implement the international instruments adopted by the international community, if we are truly to protect international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on children in armed conflict, with a particular emphasis on child victims of armed non-State actors, and thank today's briefers for their presentations.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, but let me underline some aspects of particular significance to my country.

The harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and its long-term consequences for durable peace, security and development are undeniable. Children, because of their vulnerability, not only suffer directly the consequences of armed conflict and of the collapse of the social fabric, but are deliberately targeted and subjected to forced recruitment, sexual violence, displacement, killing, maiming and abduction, among other appalling brutalities. The situation has been exacerbated by the actions of extremist non-State armed groups, as recent events that have shocked the world's conscience have proved, such as the abduction of more than 200 school girls by Boko Haram, the deliberate attacks perpetrated against a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, or the barbaric acts committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other extremist groups.

Protecting children from the ravages of war is a moral imperative and an issue of international peace and security. Since 1996, when Mrs. Graça Machel presented her study (A/51/306) on the impact of armed conflict on children, much has been done, and for several years the Council has developed a normative framework for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict and for the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law. However, despite the significant progress achieved and the establishment of a strong normative framework through the adoption of several resolutions, enormous challenges remain, due in particular to the changing nature of conflict.

Portugal believes that the Council must continue to seek the best way to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict and to better respond to the magnitude and extent of the challenges posed by the tremendous brutality of the acts of violence committed by non-State armed groups. In that regard, action plans are an outstanding tool to engage with armed forces and non-State armed groups, and can play a positive role in ending violations against children. We welcome the ongoing coordination efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, but believe that further efforts are necessary to engage with non-State armed groups, and to that end the cooperation of concerned Governments is crucial. I wish to make a few points.

First, we believe that the Council should consider expanding the list of triggers for listing perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual report, to include abduction. Abduction has become a warfare tactic used by extremist non-State actors to terrorize and control specific ethnic or religious communities and it is a first sign of alert for further human rights abuses. Children are being abducted to serve as combatants or to be used as bombers, sexual slaves and other unspeakable abuses.

Secondly, we must address the issue of impunity. Most of the persistent perpetrators listed in the annual report of the Secretary-General are non-State armed groups. Portugal believes that the International Criminal Court continues to play a fundamental deterrent role, complementary to the roles of tribunals at the national and international levels, by holding perpetrators accountable and by investigating and prosecuting those responsible for committing atrocities against children.

On peacekeeping operations, Portugal strongly supports the inclusion of child protection advisers in mandates, as well as mandatory training on the protection of children, to ensure that the situation of children affected by armed conflict is adequately addressed in peace missions by promoting advocacy, mainstreaming, training, monitoring and reporting. We must ensure adequate predeployment training in child protection for peacekeepers and effective screening of peacekeepers to ensure that individuals who have committed grave violations against children do not serve with the United Nations.

Lastly, we remain severely concerned with the ongoing pattern of attacks on schools and with their use for military purposes. Schools and education facilities are being systematically used as barracks, firing positions, detention centres and torture chambers both by regular armed forces and by armed non-State opposition groups, endangering children and rendering them vulnerable to attack. Portugal endorses the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict as concrete guidelines to protect educational infrastructures from use by armed groups for military purposes and to minimize the negative impact that armed conflict has on education.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched last year by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, whom I wish to congratulate, and UNICEF, which Portugal fully supports.

It is time to end the suffering of child victims of armed conflict and violence. Children should attend school, play and be able to enjoy their childhood without suffering from the effects of war or armed conflict. It is our collective duty to do our outmost to further improve their lives by intensifying the use of the instruments at the disposal of the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Tin (Myanmar): At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate focusing on child victims of non-State armed groups. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and all the other briefers for their insightful briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The world today is confronting the complexities of new challenges. The nature of conflicts and threats are changing. We are now witnessing a growing magnitude of new threats rooted in non-State armed groups. The impacts on innocent children of the brutalities committed by violent non-State actors are also quite alarming. Therefore, the choice of today's theme is very timely and relevant.

Ten years after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), significant progress has been made in seeking cooperation and compliance by national security forces, as almost all of them already have their own action plan to address this issue. Yet, it is discouraging to learn that 2014 was marked by a multiplication of conflicts, making children even more vulnerable. Sharing this valid concern, Myanmar has lent its full support to the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which was launched a year ago. Myanmar fully shares the common objective of the campaign to see national security forces delisted by 2016.

In my own country, Myanmar, we have started serious efforts with the Government army, or Tatmadaw, to accelerate the implementation of its action plan in close cooperation with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting since 2012. Myanmar's armed forces have implemented virtually all steps outlined in the action plan. Those include the issuance of military directives prohibiting the recruitment of minors under 18, the criminalization of such recruitments, taking action against offenders, the setting up of complaint mechanisms, the launching of a nationwide awareness campaign, providing human rights training for military personnel and the granting of access to monitor the Government military facilities, as well as some border guard forces. Every complaint is thoroughly investigated and all underage recruits identified were discharged and reintegrated. The Government's efforts for rehabilitation and reintegration need to be given enhanced support to prevent them from falling victim again.

Myanmar has recently completed a review with the United Nations team of the action plan and agreed on the workplan and the remaining steps to move forward. With the support of the United Nations, we hope that the Government army will be able to meet the target set by the campaign. The successful delisting of the Government armed forces will have a positive influence on the remaining parties of non-State armed groups to follow suit.

As non-State actors constitute a large majority among the parties listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/339), the Council must continue to focus more on the behaviour of non-State actors. But there are a number of constraints and challenges in doing so. While nation States could be controlled by the applicable international human rights instruments, non-State actors cannot. There are also concerns over the sensitive question of legitimacy that could arise from the United Nations dealing directly with non-State actors. Interaction between the United Nations and non-State armed groups should be conducted through consultations with concerned Governments, who bear the primary responsibility to protect their own civilians, including children. At the same time, the Governments concerned find themselves in the difficult position of being expected to influence non-State actors or allow the United Nations team access to areas controlled by non-State actors due to security problems.

The best way to end conflict-related violations against children is none other than putting an end to armed conflicts. Therefore, the Government is accelerating its peace process with all non-State ethnic armed groups in Myanmar to end the six-decade-long conflict. The seventh round of peace talks held in Yangon last week has made substantive progress on remaining contentious issues, auguring well for reaching the nationwide ceasefire agreement and political dialogue. This is likely to present better opportunities for encouraging non-State parties to include political commitments for the protection children and for addressing the issue of underage recruits. With greater peace and stability in the country, we believe that the conflict-related violence against children will eventually come to an end.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Myanmar's continued commitment to working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and Council member States to enhance its efforts in protecting children affected by armed conflicts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): I would like to thank the French presidency for convening today's open debate. Let me commend also Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, for their tireless work. I would also like to thank the other briefers today, especially Mr. Junior Nzita for his very moving testimony and his activities in the field.

We reiterate our strong support for the United Nations "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. We also welcome the fact that the United Nations Security Council systematically holds debates on this issue.

While Poland aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, I would like to make additional remarks in our national capacity.

The preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child expresses our desire to raise children in "a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding". The international community should undertake every possible effort to eradicate the root causes and consequences of the engagement of children in armed conflict. Abductions, killings in attacks against schools, military use of schools, the recruitment of children as soldiers, sexual assaults — all of these violent and cruel crimes, often committed against children by non-State armed groups, have to be addressed and punished. All those responsible for violations and abuses of children's rights in armed conflict should be held accountable, including by referring the most severe cases of such violations and abuses to the International Criminal Court.

The United Nations is guided by Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), but it is also important that other United Nations partners, including regional organizations, implement it in their field activities. In that regard, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the document adopted this past Monday, 23 March, by the NATO North Atlantic Council, entitled "The Protection of Children in Armed Conflict: Progress Achieved and the Way Forward". The recommendations contained in that document highlight the need to include resolution 1612 (2005) in the process of planning and conducting NATO missions.

In Poland's opinion, child protection should also be addressed in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts in which we are involved. In November 2014, the United Nations celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a universal treaty initiated in 1989 by my country. On that occasion, Poland's First Lady, Mrs. Anna Komorowska, visited the United Nations and appealed for decisive steps of international community to protect children. As she pointed out:

> "Our concern for children should be a priority on both the national and international levels. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was one of the main Polish achievements in the field of international human rights promotion. The United Nations could now consider the establishment of international ombudsman on the rights of the child. His/her mission would be to investigate atrocities committed against children, as well as participate in procedures before international organs like the International Criminal Court."

Finally, let me also reiterate that all countries should sign, ratify and effectively implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, with a view to preserving the dignity of children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month, and for convening this important debate. Furthermore, I would like to extend our appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the rest of the briefers for their insightful information.

South Africa attaches high importance to the protection of children in armed conflict. My delegation recognizes that the protection of civilians, including women and children in conflict situations is, by its very nature, the primary responsibility of individual Member States. My delegation reiterates our support for resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict on this significant tenth anniversary of the mandate. The Secretary-General's "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched on 6 March 2014 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, presented another opportunity to pay particular attention to this challenge.

Additionally, on 7 March 2014, a historical landmark was documented when the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2143 (2014). That resolution expresses deep concern about the military use of schools by armed forces and non-State armed groups. It also condemns "all violations of applicable international law on recruitment and use and abuse of children by parties to armed conflict". In that regard, my delegation condemns such attacks and recruitment of children and calls upon all concerned parties to protect children, as well as their schools.

South Africa believes that all children deserve protection, not exploitation. They belong in school, not armies and fighting groups. Children should be armed with pens and textbooks, not guns. That campaign complements other United Nations efforts, such as the Global Education First Initiative, to secure children's rights and provide dignity, opportunity and a better life. We support the Secretary-General's call on

> "all concerned Governments, regional and non-governmental organizations to work with the United Nations to intensify efforts to meet our goal of zero use of children by any Government forces by 2016".

One of the African Union's aspirations for agenda 2063 is that by 2020 all guns will be silent and Africa will be a peaceful and secure continent with harmony among communities of nations. As conflicts are increasingly being experienced within States and involve non-State groups such as terrorist or rebel groups, such groups are less likely to be concerned with or to abide by humanitarian laws that provide for the protection of children. Much more must be done by the international community with regard to addressing violence against children.

Furthermore, mechanisms to promote and defend children's collective security need to be highlighted. That includes the use of child soldiers in conflict. Despite that noble call, children continue to be kidnapped and forcibly conscripted or recruited into service throughout the world as sex slaves, helpers, guards and armed fighters. In that process children's rights are being violated with impunity. Many die. Others are displaced from their communities and homes, and allowed to suffer untold emotional, developmental, physical, psychological, mental and spiritual harm, as seen in the indoctrination of children into extremist non-State armed groups.

In addition, armed conflict destroys State structures that provide social services. The lack of those services further prevents children from accessing basic services such as education, health, water, sanitation and nutritious food, thereby deepening poverty. These are factors of key importance for national and international peace and security that demand immediate as well as long-term collective attention by the international community.

The importance of children having access to basic services during conflict as well as post-conflict periods cannot be stressed enough. My delegation strongly rejects the mass atrocities committed by extremist groups such as Boko Haram, which also have a direct impact on children. South Africa wishes to amplify the international community's call with regard to the "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign. It is disturbing to note that, on 14 April, it will be exactly one year since that horrendous incident occurred.

South Africa will continue to support actions aimed at preventing child recruitment, and ensure that child soldiers are reintegrated back into their community during the demobilization and reintegration phases. Moreover, South Africa supports actions aimed at child protection in the training of peacekeepers. Protection of civilians, in particular women and children, must also

take into account the interlinkage between security and development.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, which commences by identifying the objective "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". That speaks directly to our children and the next generation. We must remember that promise of a more peaceful and safer world to our children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Okamura (Japan) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and the other speakers for their briefings. The problems of children today will become the problems of adults in 10 years. Not only do armed conflicts deprive children of an opportunity to grow in a balanced manner, with access to education, but they also create a new generation of adults who will have known nothing but war and who will not know how to live in a world without conflict. It is therefore our duty to seriously engage with the issue of children and armed conflict to prevent future wars.

The issue has become even more pressing with the staggering rise of armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In that respect, I would like to congratulate France for having organized this timely and relevant debate on the child victims of non-State armed groups.

We believe that the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, adopted in 2007, should be considered an important tool for Member States and international organizations.

Japan welcomes the fact that the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which was launched on 6 March 2014 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and UNICEF, has achieved clear results in one year. Chad has been removed the list of problem countries, leaving only seven countries on that list. In Myanmar, approximately 400 child soldiers have been released, and Yemen has signed an action plan.

However, that progress is far from sufficient. It should be noted that, under the strategy to end the recruitment and use of children by national security forces, which was drawn up by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF, a total of $32.8 million over two years will be required for the implementation of the action plan to bring the number of child soldiers in the armed forces of the countries concerned to zero by the end of 2016.

In that regard, Japan supports several projects in the Middle East and Africa, in partnership with UNICEF, to promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. That helps to prevent those children from once again becoming combatants as a result of economic difficulties, inter alia. Japan has thus funded $80 million worth of various projects for the rehabilitation of child soldiers over the past six years.

Today, we are paying special attention to an important question: how can we apply the knowledge acquired through that campaign to non-State armed groups? Indeed, of the 59 groups listed in the annexes to the 2014 report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/339), 51 are non-State actors. It would, of course, be difficult to immediately conclude plans of action between the United Nations and non-State armed groups. However, I believe it is possible to advance step by step in that direction. For example, the United Nations could try to convince non-State actors with which it is already in contact to negotiate peace agreements, among other things, that would provide that they renounce the practice of recruiting children into their ranks. It could also mediate between the non-State opposing forces to arrange for a simultaneous release of their child soldiers.

As mentioned in the concept note (S/2015/1o8, annex) prepared for this debate, non-State armed extremist groups increasingly employ child abduction as a strategy. We are deeply concerned by the massive abductions of children by groups such as Boko Haram and ISIL. The abduction of children is the first act of violence against them. It can open the door to forced recruitment and other barbaric acts, such as sexual violence and murder. Japan therefore believes that there will be a real gap in our commitments to deal with the problem of children associated with armed groups, if abduction is excluded from the list of triggers. Abductions are part of the criteria that should be listed in the annex to the relevant reports of the Secretary-General, and we believe that we must take steps to fill that gap.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union.

First, let me thank France for organizing this important debate and in particular for extending an invitation to Member States to make concrete proposals for a non-paper. We have included some practical suggestions in my statement. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for the important role she plays in promoting and protecting the rights of children affected by armed conflict.

(*spoke in French*)

I was personally touched by the story told by my neighbour, Mr. Junior Nzita. It truly touched my heart, and I thank him.

(*spoke in English*)

The protection of children in armed conflict should be a major concern for all of us. The fate of children is closely linked to peace, justice and development, the three priorities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands here at the United Nations. Today allow me to make three specific points: prevention, the vulnerability of girls and accountability.

My first point is on prevention and mediation. We need an integrated approach for the prevention of the abuse of children's rights by non-State armed groups before, during and after conflict. We need to invest more capacity and resources in mediation by the United Nations, and the relevant programme run by the Department of Political Affairs, which we support, should be strengthened. The mandates of United Nations missions should be well coordinated to address the protection of children coherently. UNICEF has the mandate to address the rights of children with both State and non-State actors. We urge States to cooperate closely with UNICEF to more effectively address those violations. In that context, a UNICEF symposium on the effects of conflict on the mental health of children will take place in The Hague from 26 to 28 May 2015. Furthermore, the Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to express its continued support for the concept of the responsibility to protect. National Governments and the international community share a responsibility to enable children to grow up in a safe and peaceful environment.

My second point is on the particular risks for girls. They demand specific attention from the Council. Girls are especially vulnerable targets of sexual violence. The acts of some extremist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, are atrocious and abhorrent. Those groups seem to take pride in the trafficking of young girls, forcing them to marry and exploiting them as sex slaves. Because of the vulnerability of girls, the Netherlands has deployed several experts on sexual and gender-based violence in United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world, and we intend to step up our efforts in that area.

My third point is on sanctions and accountability. We need a stronger focus on child protection in the Council's sanctions committees. That could be realized by enhancing cooperation between the sanctions committees on the one hand and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on the other. Furthermore, the Council could request input from the Special Rapporteur on issues such as the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Ensuring accountability for the crimes committed against children should be a key priority for the Security Council. Documentation can be an important step to that end. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports organizations that document war crimes. Last February, we organized an expert conference in The Hague on documenting war crimes in Syria. Ensuring accountability for the atrocious crimes in Syria, also crimes against children, is a historic responsibility for the Council.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that the Security Council should play a more active role in the documentation and monitoring of crimes against children in armed conflict. We believe that the Council should therefore expand the listing criteria under resolution 1612 (2005) to include abductions of children, and it could do so in a non-paper. The problem of the abduction of children by extremist groups is increasing and needs to be addressed.

In conclusion, all children deserve protection against all forms of violence. Sexual abduction, abuse, mutilation and the killing of children during armed conflict simply has to stop. The Kingdom of the Netherlands, as a partner for peace, justice and development, will do its utmost to achieve those goals.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to take the floor on behalf of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NATO recognizes that protecting children from the effects of armed conflict is a moral imperative. The nature of contemporary warfare has created significant threats against children, who have been used and abused by unscrupulous armed forces and armed groups. They are frequently the victims of indiscriminate attacks, and they are subjected to sexual violence. In my statement, I will describe the substantial measures that NATO, supported by its operational partners, has taken to implement resolution 1612 (2005) and related resolutions.

The protection of children in NATO-led operations and missions was addressed by NATO at our 2012 Summit in Chicago. At that meeting, NATO's Heads of State and Government tasked NATO with developing practical, field-oriented measures to address violations against children. Following that Summit, the North Atlantic Council approved NATO military guidelines on children and armed conflict. Those guidelines seek to integrate resolution 1612 (2005) into NATO's operational and exercise activities and to educate and train our troops on the obligations stipulated in the relevant resolutions.

Another important step was the launch, in 2013, of an online course developed jointly by NATO and the United Nations. The course aims to raise awareness among NATO-led forces before deployment, as mentioned in resolution 2143 (2014), adopted a year ago.

But we did not stop there. At the NATO Summit in Wales in September last year, NATO's Heads of State and Government expressed their deep concern about the damaging effects of armed conflicts on children and reaffirmed their commitment to the further implementation of resolution 1612 (2005). They decided that we should assess how to ensure that NATO was sufficiently prepared whenever and wherever the issue of children and armed conflict is likely to be encountered. We are doing so in close cooperation with the United Nations.

We are basing that work on our experience in leading the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF). That mission came to an end last December and has provided many lessons for future operations. The ISAF experience has laid the groundwork for our efforts in relation to the protection of children.

We are continuing this important work in our current mission in Afghanistan, Resolute Support. That mission aims to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and Afghanistan's security institutions with a view to ensuring their durability and ability to sustain themselves. The protection of children is an important theme in that assistance programme.

For the first time, the position of child protection adviser has been included in a NATO-led mission. Such an adviser will focus on further implementing resolution 1612 (2005), with the aim of ingraining the ethos of child protection into the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. We are assisting the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in its efforts to help Afghanistan to take the steps required to justified Afghanistan's removal from the list annexed to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339).

Building on the task set by the Wales Summit, the North Atlantic Council just this week issued a policy paper entitled "The Protection of Children in Armed Conflict — The Way Forward", which seeks to enhance the effectiveness of the NATO military guidelines on children and armed conflict in all future NATO-led missions and operations. The paper provides NATO's military authorities with additional guidance on the further integration of resolution 1612 (2005) and related resolutions into the Alliance's military doctrine, education, training and exercises. That will ensure that the imperative to protect children affected by armed conflict is included in the planning and preparation stages of all NATO-led missions.

That guidance will result in more robust reporting during operations. A robust reporting procedure will help provide timely and reliable information on the violation of children's rights, particularly the six practices identified by the Secretary-General as grave violations. In short, our commanders and deployed personnel have better, more precise guidance on how to proceed whenever and wherever they encounter such violations.

In developing that guidance and in integrating resolution 1612 (2005) into NATO's military doctrine, NATO has regularly consulted the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, and her excellent staff. I would like to

take this opportunity to thank her, on NATO's behalf, for her leadership and her support.

Every day, we see horrifying reports in the news about atrocities committed against children, such as mass kidnappings, sexual violence and the forcing of child soldiers to commit unspeakable acts. But I believe it is possible through the concerted efforts of all international actors to help make such barbarity a thing of the past. It goes without saying that there remains a long way to go. But let me assure the Security Council that NATO and our partner nations place the highest importance on fulfilling our responsibilities under resolution 1612 (2005) and related resolutions. We will continue to work conscientiously and seriously to ensure that we meet the goal set out by our leaders at the Wales Summit. Through our continued engagement on this issue, I am confident that NATO can make a lasting contribution to the wider international effort to help protect children affected by armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Paik Ji-ah (Republic of Korea): I thank the the French presidency for organizing today's debate. On the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), this debate offers a valuable and timely opportunity to strengthen our determination to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts and to prevent the victimization of children in armed conflict. My delegation appreciates the two-step initiative by the two presidencies, France this month and Malaysia in June, which allows for in-depth discussions on this critical issue.

The number of child victims in conflict situations never ceases to increase, in particular owing to the ruthless violence by non-State armed groups. Under those circumstances, the protection of children in armed conflict demands our common and urgent efforts. In that regard, it is encouraging that most countries concerned by the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign have shown their commitment to ensuring that Government forces are free of children. Through that campaign, States Members of the United Nations can clearly demonstrate their resolve to protect children and take the moral high ground vis-à-vis non-State armed groups. To make our resolve more effective and binding, more Member States need to join child protection-related legal and guidance frameworks, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the various principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. Such a drive will consolidate not only our political commitment, but it will also uphold the rule of law.

We are deeply concerned about the increasing inhumane atrocities victimizing children, especially by extremist non-State armed groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram. Abductions, maiming, sexual violence, attacks on schools and the use of children as suicide bombers are all unacceptable. We believe that none of us have wavered in fighting against such war crimes and crimes against humanity. In that regard, we support the inclusion of abduction by armed groups as one of the violations that could trigger a listing in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report.

Changes on the ground, however, can come about only with concrete actions. The more we act with sincerety and resolution, the sooner this tragedy will end. Impunity will not end when perpetrators go unpunished. Appropriate punishment for perpetrators serves as an effective way to prevent violations and abuses against children. In that context, the International Criminal Court's verdict on the *Thomas Lubanga Dyilo* case in December is a wake-up call to perpetrators who are committing violations against children. We also believe that targeted sanctions by the Security Council can act as an effective deterrent, raising awareness about the consequences. We hope that the Council will consider a resolution that includes serious violations against children as a designated criterion for sanctions.

Lastly, we would like to recall that the best way to protect children in devastating conflicts is to end the conflicts themselves. That is why national and regional leaders in conflict-ridden areas are strongly urged to redouble their efforts for a peaceful solution. In addressing how to properly protect a child victim, we should not ignore the psychological effects conflicts have on the victims. Children and youths are especially vulnerable to politically distorted and misleading propaganda. Community leaders therefore need to do their utmost to warmly embrace and reintegrate child victims into their communities. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, which addresses a wide range of post-conflict peacebuilding issues, the Republic of Korea will pay particular attention to the matter.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): During the four years of the Syrian crisis, terrorist organizations have striven to destroy the innocence of children and to create fertile ground for that tactic and for hatred. They have done that by educating terrorists — if I can put it that way — in training camps in Syria and neighbouring countries. Various groups are involved in this, and they have become more deadly than in the past. Their recruitment targets children as young as the age of four years. Given the silence of some and the complicity of others, terrorism has been given license to spread across the globe, covering all four corners of the world.

We note that my country's delegation has on many occasions here in the Council Chamber vainly sought to draw the international community's attention to the phenomenon of the recruitment of Syrian children in those areas controlled by armed terrorist groups such as Daesh, the Islamic Front, the Army of Islam and other armed groups. Criminal brigades have been created and appointed with names such as Ashbal Al-Zarqawi. These young groups of children are part of the Al Nusra Front, and maybe the Council is unaware of what that group consists of. These brigades use children aged from 5 to 15 years; for them, childhood ends very early. They become adolescents who are trained to participate in fighting. Brainwashing takes place in the training camps, which prepares them to defend fatwas. They grow into ignorant, bearded criminals who know nothing of civilization and the tenets of the Islamic religion.

In the regions where they are present, these armed terrorist groups are depriving children education. Their education has been replaced by terrorist indoctrination. Similarly, those very groups have decreed that there is to be no education in certain areas of Syria until the State schoolbooks are modified in line with the groups' religious rulings. As documented in a January 2015 UNICEF report, the education of more than 670,000 potential Syrian schoolchildren in major cities has been disrupted. Furthermore, after being pillaged, schools and hospitals have become barracks and execution centres. Terrorist attacks perpetrated by armed terrorist groups and by moderate opposition groups have increased in number and have targeted hospitals, infrastructures and schools, resulting in many victims, particularly among children. In 2015 alone, 85 children have been killed and 224 wounded. Those terrorist crimes have been the subject of many letters sent by the Syrian Government to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council. The latest two are identical letters dated from 23 March 2015.

Since the outset of the crisis, the Syrian Government, in line with its constitutional responsibilities to protect its own citizens, as is the case with all Member States, has taken measures to protect children, including some legal measures that prevent the recruitment of children into combat of any form. Furthermore, the Syrian Government adopted a decree to that effect on 6 May 2013. As an example, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labour has identified a number of safe areas for children who have been liberated following their abduction and training by terrorist and Takfiri groups of all sorts. Those children with legal difficulties are sent to correctional facilities. Their cases are comprehensively evaluated by specialists, including in terms of their psychosocial state, so as to identify appropriate programmes and assistance to be provided to these children.

Despite tireless efforts made by the Syrian Government to protect children from destructive Takfiri and Wahhabi ideology, we all know that we must uproot that phenomenon in order to deal with the problem. What we now need to do is to put an end to the policies of the Governments that support terrorism with financial resources, weapons and training. We must take steps against those countries to implement the Council's resolutions against terrorism, including resolution 2199 (2015). And the Government of Syria must be given assistance to rehabilitate and reintegrate children into their communities. Otherwise, war materiel will continue to flood into Syria and there will be further bloodshed. The crisis will continue, producing future generations willing to kill or trained to kill under orders.

In conclusion, the recruitment of children by non-State armed groups is an international issue that requires radical solutions. It is vital, therefore, to uproot organized terrorism, which prevails in a number of countries, such as in my own country, Syria, and in Iraq, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Mali, Colombia and others. The legitimate Governments of those countries, just as in my own country, are trying to uproot such terrorism, day after day. We must therefore all concentrate on this issue in an honest way instead of politicizing the debate and coming up with concept papers. We must also distinguish between the rights of legitimate Governments to combat terrorists who recruit children on the one hand, and the issue of

children who are victims of non-State armed terrorist groups, on the other.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to congratulate you, Sir, for having organized this debate, which reflects the commitment of France and the effort it continues to devote to this topic.

I would like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing. I also thank Ms. Yoka Brandt and Ms. Julie Bodin, of UNICEF and Save the Children, respectively, for their presentations. Lastly, I would like to thank Mr. Junior Nzita for his testimony.

Today, too many children around the world are still victims of emergency situations that seem to know no end. We are faced with ever-more complex conflicts, unprecedented forms of violence and challenges posed by terrorists, such as violent extremist groups. Such armed groups continue to count a large number of children among their ranks.

The increase in acts of extreme violence perpetrated by groups with extremist ideologies, such as Boko Haram and Daesh, have shocked the global conscience. The exacerbation of tension and proliferation of conflicts herald enormous challenges for the entire international community, but it is on children that their impact is most tragic and unacceptable. They are tragic as children are those exposed most directly to violence by conflicts and their collateral damage, and their basic rights are violated. This is unacceptable because children are at times exploited, brainwashed or indoctrinated against their will by the parties to a conflict, and used as child soldiers on the battlefield, in clear violation of international law. Acts such as the abduction by Boko Haram of hundreds of girls and boys from their schools, and the targeting of children by Daesh, among others, unfortunately show that violence against children knows no boundaries, and elicit in us a sense of outrage and consternation.

The Kingdom of Morocco condemns all forms of violence against children, their abduction by State or non-State armed groups, their use as human shields around arms stockpiles or barracks, or their abduction as hostages or recruitment in refugee camps. Morocco also condemns attacks against schools and hospitals and their for military or tactical ends. While today's debate will have a positive effect in remobilizing the stakeholders among the international community, we must, unfortunately, note that the efforts made to date to end the involvement or use of children in armed conflicts have been insufficient. Indeed, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the various resolutions of the Security Council, and the Paris Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups have fallen short in achieving their noble objectives. My delegation therefore believes that the efforts of the international community to deal effectively with this problem would benefit from a multidimensional approach, as follows.

It must be comprehensive, based on a thorough understanding of the underlying and structural causes of these conflicts, such as poverty, discrimination, social exclusion, and economic and social inequalities. It must be strategic, so as not only to deal with conflicts under way, but also to focus on prevention, including by sowing the seeds of democracy and human rights, strengthening good governance and promoting sustainable development. It must be crosscutting, engaging and empowering all stakeholders, including public institutions, civil society, the media, non-governmental organizations and human rights organizations. It must be modular so as to take into account the diverse and changing nature of armed conflict, as well as the specifics of each conflict, and it must be pragmatic, combining both incentives and coercive measures, in particularly when it comes to accountability and the fight against impunity. It must be integral, providing for reparations for the violations committed and for the reintegration of child soldiers into society in the context of appropriate reconciliation processes.

As Ms. Zerrougui highlighted this morning, the continued and increased recruitment of children into armed conflicts, including by armed jihadist such as the Islamic State, and the abduction of hundreds of girls by the terrorist group Boko Haram, demands action from us all and calls for coordination of the efforts of the international community. Coordinating these efforts among the various stakeholders of the United Nations system will guarantee efficiency and success.

However, the primary responsibility lies with the parties to the conflict, who must comply with their international obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions and international conventions. At

the same time, national child protection strategies remain essential for building the capacity of Governments and for material, financial and human resources to ensure their sustainability. This is why a prompt and generous response is so important to the call in the Secretary-General's report (S/2014/339) on donors to meet the funding requirements for the implementation of national plans of action and programmes.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): Today's debate is timely, as the severe effects of conflicts on children continue to constitute a significant challenge. The attention devoted to the issue by the Security Council, exemplified by the adoption of important resolutions and the increased momentum achieved by the tireless efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, has led to significant progress. In fact, this month marked the first anniversary of the groundbreaking "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which deserves our unyielding support. The developments in the legal and normative framework on children and armed conflict are positive, yet significant shortcomings remain.

Unfortunately, with the changing nature of conflicts, mass abductions, torture and sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, limited access to even the most basic humanitarian needs, and large-scale displacement have become realities of war. Furthermore, the several conflicts we face today, in diverse geographies, have revealed the increasing involvement of non-State armed groups in violating even the basic rights of children. The appalling atrocities committed by terrorist organizations such as Daesh and Boko Haram, must be underlined in this regard. Furthermore, many terrorist organizations, including the Kurdish Workers Party, Kongra-Gel, Al-Qaida and Daesh recruit children. It is essential to redouble efforts to counter the spread of extremist ideologies and prevent the recruitment tactics of terrorist organizations such as Daesh, including in source countries.

Last month's report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/28/69) highlighted the deterioration of children's rights in Syria. In fact, as the crisis enters its fifth year, the generation of young Syrians is still in danger of being lost to a cycle of violence. The basic rights of millions of Syrian children, such as their rights to life, security, health and education, are being undermined everyday by various actors. Nearly four million Syrians have fled their country. Despite all challenges, Turkey has pursued an open door policy for these people without any discrimination of religion or ethnic origin. More than 250,000 Syrians are being accommodated in 25 temporary protection centres in Turkey. To date, more than 47,000 babies have been born in these centres. In addition, more than 1.5 million Syrians living outside of these centres are also under our protection regime and benefit from free medical services.

One cannot overemphasize the fact that children are among the most vulnerable groups in this crisis situation. I would like to underscore how urgent it is that we meet the growing needs of Syrian children, especially in the areas of education and health care. There are almost 550,000 Syrian children of school age in Turkey. Around 70,000 students are being educated in 963 classrooms in the temporary shelter centres. Outside the centres there are almost 480,000 children in need of education. Education is thus a vital part of our regional refugee and resilience plan, and emphasis must be placed on creating more classrooms and education opportunities for these children. We expect the international community to provide technical support and proper funding for implementing the "No Lost Generation" initiative of the United Nations.

Demonstrating united, robust political determination and concerted action is our most crucial tool for addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. We must support United Nations efforts to provide children with essential assistance and the monitoring and reporting functions that facilitate better planning, protection and response. Furthermore, the growth in the number and scope of conflicts around the world renders cooperation and coordination between United Nations, countries and regional organizations more important than ever. We must also ensure that in areas of conflict, children's full access to humanitarian care and to justice is a priority.

As we try to identify the range of actions and tools that we can use to stop non-State armed groups recruiting and using children, we should also bear in mind that signing agreements with non-State armed groups can easily lead to exploitation of the issue and encourage such groups to use the agreements as propaganda for their claims to legitimacy. We therefore believe strongly that international organizations and non-governmental organizations should refrain from

drawing up any kind of document, including so-called deeds of commitment, with terrorist organizations. In fact, concrete steps aimed at strengthening the legal framework for preventing terrorist organizations' recruiting activities and punishing them for such activities should be at the top of our agenda.

In conclusion, I would like to express our readiness to give our full support to international and regional efforts related to the protection of children.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to the observer of the African Union.

Mr. Antonio (African Union): On behalf of the African Union Commission and myself, I would like to congratulate you warmly, Mr. President, on your country's presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and Ms. Leila Zerrougui, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the representatives of civil society from Save the Children and Paix pour l'enfance, the latter represented by my dear brother and cousin Nzita. I should not pass up this opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude for their worthy efforts and commitment to the comprehensive and lasting protection for our future nation builders.

The choice of "Child victims of non-State armed groups" as the theme for our debate today is both timely and relevant. Coming as it does after the ceremony on 12 February marking the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, today's meeting highlights how essential it is we give this issue a special place on our political agenda and study it thoroughly in order to identify the challenges involved and the responsibilities that must be met at the international level.

The fact is that this dangerous phenomenon, which is partly the result of post-Cold War intra-State conflicts, often brings with it abuses and violations of human rights, and particularly those of women and children, the most vulnerable groups. In Africa more than anywhere else, this conflict dynamic continues to produce tragic situations, with disastrous effects on children's development and survival. They have become a breeding ground providing fighters for the terrorist groups operating on the continent that are major exploiters of child soldiers, such as Boko Haram, Al-Qaida, the Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest and Al-Shabaab, and for malicious groups in other regions, such as the Lord's Resistance Army. Forced conscription, abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence, killing, maiming and the creation of refugees are the main direct consequences of the barbaric acts that such groups commit against our children. The effects on children's physical and mental health, education and general welfare are extremely dangerous.

The African Union (AU), whose diplomatic, judicial and political commitment to children is eloquently expressed in its actions, has continued its efforts to resolve conflicts and ensure the protection of human rights, particularly of children. The legal arsenal we have developed for that purpose includes the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Taken together, those instruments add up to a chain of standards, some of them highly innovative, that exceed international requirements and place children at the centre of the challenges and imperatives of peace, development and progress.

Furthermore, the African Union's critical role in maintaining peace and security and promoting transparent governance at every level has made a significant contribution to the protection of civilians, including children. The peace operations deployed by the AU in response to situations of conflict on the continent, particularly in Burundi, the Darfur region of the Sudan, Mali, the Central African Republic and Somalia, have played a key role in that regard. Here, I cannot fail to stress the importance of the agreement signed on 17 September 2013 between the Peace and Security Department of the Commission of the African Union and the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The agreement enables us to back the ongoing efforts designed to put the protection of children at the centre of every issue related to peace and security in Africa. We welcome the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union in this area, including the support from UNICEF.

The concept note that frames today's debate (S/2015/168, annex) makes eloquent mention of the effect that precarious economic situations have on the recruitment of children into armed groups. Unaware of the possible dangers, our children are sometimes forced to go to enter the ranks of armed groups simply in order to feed or clothe themselves. That is why it is vital that we support Africa's efforts to bring about a positive

and inclusive socioeconomic transformation benefiting every sector of the population, including children.

For their part, Africa's leaders are more determined than ever to work to build a more just and prosperous future. The adoption of Agenda 2063 at the twenty-fourth Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa on 30 and 31 January is in fact an expression of their willingness to inject the necessary momentum with the goal of achieving a strong, united, prosperous and peaceful Africa.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Dotta (Uruguay) (*spoke in French*): Uruguay would like to thank France for organizing today's debate during its presidency of the Security Council.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

We would also like to thank France for enabling the presence at this meeting of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the Executive Director of UNICEF, which testified to the importance of today's debate. We should all take note of how meaningful that is to all of us.

Likewise, Uruguay wishes Malaysia success in its work in this very important Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Although this debate has sought to place special focus on children who are victims of non-State armed groups, my delegation believes that all children affected by conflict are in the same situation and require equal protection.

Uruguay commends the invaluable work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and we reiterate our support for her mandate. We wish to highlight the work done in coordination with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations aimed at incorporating measures to address the situation of children in countries where there are peacekeeping operations.

Uruguay welcomes the tenth anniversary of the creation of a mechanism to systematically monitor and report on the six grave violations of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict: the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment or use of child soldiers, sexual violence against children, attacks against schools and hospitals, denial of humanitarian access to children, and child abduction.

Uruguay also commends the work of UNICEF, in coordination with Ms. Zerrougui, which is indispensable to put an end to recruitment by States or security forces or armed groups. We are concerned at the situation that is being experienced now and has been for a period of time by the children in the Syrian Arab Republic, where 14 million children are affected. Two million live in areas without humanitarian access, 2.6 million live in areas without access to education, and 2 million live in refugees camps in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Of course, the interrelated crisis with Iraq also means that 8.2 million children live in areas far from their homes, in areas controlled by armed groups of various origins.

With so many children in danger, the future of humanity is also in danger. The Security Council and the United Nations as a whole face a choice between civilization and barbarism. We have always been committed to defending the rights of children in situations of armed conflict, as can be seen in the annual submission and negotiation of resolutions on the rights of children, both in the General Assembly and in Human Rights Council.

Uruguay also shares the Secretary-General's concern and his commitment to eradicating violence against children and echoes his call for countries that have not yet done so to sign or ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

Although this debate has sought to focus on children that are victims of non-State armed groups, which is very important, we do not wish to overlook the fact that despite the fact that such groups are aberrant, terrible and unacceptable, most of the children recruited are recruited by their own States; this is unacceptable to the international community and to this Organization. This issue is on the General Assembly's agenda. My country plays an active role in that respect, and we hope to see a similar attitude on the part of other States.

However, it is nonetheless true that thanks to the work of the Council over the past almost 20 years, we have seen thousands of children released from conditions that violate the dignity of the human being. My country deems it fundamental that we respect the rights enshrined in various international instruments, especially article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges States to respect children's right to education.

In the resolution on the rights of the child adopted last year in the General Assembly, it was decided that

the issue of the right to education would be focused on in the operative part of the resolution to be adopted this year. Uruguay hopes that — and we will work towards this — States that have the capacity to defend this right will reaffirm it in the resolution that will be adopted during this seventieth anniversary of the Organization.

It is also important to continue working with the International Criminal Court and for the Security Council to refer cases to it, which would give more value to the work of that body, and extend this logic to other international tribunals that are responsible for the protecting of children under their jurisdiction.

Finally, we deem critical the issue of the effective reintegration of children associated with armed groups and believe that demobilization and reintegration programmes are necessary for the truly successful, effective and sustainable reintegration of children into their societies.

As long as the rights of children are disregarded and violated, and as long as children continue to be used for reprehensible purposes such as war, the scourge of which this Organization was created to eliminate, it will not be possible to maintain international peace and security or for civilization to make progress.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen Phuong Nga (Viet Nam) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to thank France for having convened this open debate on the situation of children in situations of armed conflict.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Mr. President, while commending your initiative to convene this open debate, we would like to thank Luxembourg for its successful chairmanship of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict over the past two years and congratulate our fellow ASEAN member Malaysia on its assumption of the chairmanship of that body. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing. We are grateful to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and to the other briefers for their insights.

ASEAN welcomes the progress made in the implementation of all Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict since the adoption of the first resolution, resolution 1261 (1999), to date.

We applaud the Member States concerned for their efforts in implementing their respective Council-mandated action plans and welcome the integration of the protection of children in armed conflict in their national policies. We appreciate the work done by United Nations bodies and the concerned agencies in armed conflict, particularly in monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, incorporating child-protection policies in peacekeeping operations, and promoting the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

We welcome the progress made by the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which was launched last year with the aim of ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016.

ASEAN, however, remains deeply concerned about the fact that a growing number of children continue to be affected by grave violations in armed conflicts, including killing and sexual violence. We particularly condemn the increasing number of cases of abduction of children and attacks targeting schools and hospitals. It is all the more alarming as we are witnessing the rise of complex and well-organized non-State armed groups that have total disregard for international law, especially in certain regions in the Middle East and Africa.

We urge States, United Nations entities with their respective mandates, the relevant international and regional organizations and other stakeholders to redouble their efforts to address, with added vigour, these new challenges posed by violent non-State armed groups.

In this connection, ASEAN wishes to emphasize the following points.

First, States bear the primary responsibility and authority to protect their civilians, including children, in armed conflict. Interactions between the United Nations and non-State armed groups should be conducted in line with this principle.

Secondly, non-State armed groups, as their nature, form and motives vary widely, requires different

measures of engagement and should be undertaken within a broader strategy of conflict prevention and response. That strategy should, inter alia, address the root causes of armed conflicts and cover social, economic and development issues during and after armed conflicts.

Thirdly, child protection concerns should be consistently reflected in peace processes and peace agreements, and children's particular needs must be included in post-conflict planning.

ASEAN always attaches great importance to the protection of children, especially those affected by armed conflicts, and has been working closely to prevent violations of children's rights in the region. All ASEAN member States are parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have been implementing their obligations and commitments in a serious manner at the national level. Those national efforts are closely coupled with regional cooperation efforts.

In 2013, ASEAN leaders reiterated their collective political will by adopting the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children in ASEAN. ASEAN also strives to make sure that our commitment is materialized. In 2011, the ASEAN Commission for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children was established, and is now actively implementing its 2012-2016 work plan, which includes detailed actions to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ASEAN is working closely with international partners as part of those efforts. We appreciate the continued close engagement by the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on child-protection related issues, under their respective mandates, with ASEAN member States over the years, as manifested most recently by the visit of the Special Representative for Violence against Children and to the region and her substantive discussion with the ASEAN Commission in February.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate ASEAN's continued commitment to working with Council members and the international community to protect and promote the best interests of children affected by armed conflicts. We stand ready to work closely with other States and partners in the preparations for a productive review of progress in this area, and earnestly look forward to the next Council debate on this topic in June under the presidency of Malaysia.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kadurugamuwa (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka wishes to congratulate you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate on children and armed conflict, with particular emphasis on children who are victims of non-State armed groups.

As a country that has experienced the agony of children being forcibly recruited by non-State actors in the past, we would like to highlight the relevance of today's debate coinciding with the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established a Working Group focused on children and armed conflict, as well as the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which were adopted in 2007.

During the almost three decades'-long conflict that Sri Lanka experienced, one of the most complex and painful issues to address was the horror of terrorist groups recruiting both girls and boys as combatants and suicide cadres. With the conclusion of conflict, in May 2009, a total of 594 child combatants aged between 12 and18 years of age surrendered. The Government of Sri Lanka did not criminally prosecute those children, but considered them as victims of the conflict. The Government took a series of measures to rehabilitate and reintegrate those former child combatants by providing education, recreational facilities and vocational training, as well as psychological support to help them deal with their past.

Those positive developments led the United Nation to de-list Sri Lanka from annex II to the report of the Secretary-General on child combatants in 2012. Today Sri Lanka is proud to state that all former child combatants have been rehabilitated and re-integrated into society. They have become productive and responsible citizens of Sri Lanka. Some have even sat for competitive exams and entered university.

Sri Lanka believes that the use of children in armed conflict in any capacity, as combatants or otherwise, is a clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Sri Lanka also believes that there are three effective methods to reduce the recruitment of child combatants by non-State actors. The first is to put political and economic pressure on the offending parties while strengthening law and order; the second is to mobilize resources for rehabilitation programmes;

and the third is to address the socioeconomic, political and ideological dynamics that non-State actors can use to lure children by to their so-called causes.

The Government of Sri Lanka is appreciative of United Nations agencies, such as UNICEF, and our bilateral partners for helping us in our endeavors to combat the menace of children being recruited into armed conflict, and thereafter in the task of ensuring their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In conclusion, Sri Lanka is happy to share our experience of rehabilitation and reintegration of child combatants with parties that wish to learn from our story.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Yaremenko (Ukraine): Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier this morning by the observer of the European Union. I would like to make a statement in my national capacity.

Ukraine welcomes this open debate of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict. These are not just trivial words for my country. The Council is well aware that Ukraine has suffered from Russian aggression for more than a year already. Unfortunately, we must admit that children are among those who suffer the most from the conflict.

In that regard, I wish to reiterate Ukraine's strong commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a fundamental international instrument in the area of the protection of children. The Convention and its Optional Protocols are at the core of the international system for enhancing and promoting children's right to survive, live and grow in a healthy environment, with adequate access to education, health, nutrition, safety and security.

The Russian Federation's actions constitute a blatant violation of international law, including that Convention. We urge Russia to cease its subversive activity, which is causing immense suffering to the population, mostly women and children, in the areas of eastern Ukraine controlled by illegal armed groups. Time and again, we have reiterated our appeal to the United Nations and tho the Council to undertake an adequate assessment and to take necessary measures in response to the Russian Federation's actions in temporarily occupied Crimea and in the east of Ukraine.

In that light, I would like to recall the numerous cases of abductions of children by the Russia-sponsored terrorist groups in eastern Ukraine, including from orphanages and medical facilities. Orphans are being illegally moved outside the country, and children are being killed and wounded as a result of the activities of the Russia-backed illegal armed groups in the east of Ukraine.

We all remember the shocking images following the mass shelling by pro-Russian terrorists of residential areas in Mariupol in January. As a result dozens of people were killed and more than 100 were wounded. Unfortunately, children were also among the victims: two of them were killed, dozens were wounded and orphaned and four schools and three kindergartens were damaged as a result of that blatant terrorist attack. According to the latest data from UNICEF, at least 64 children have been killed and 170 wounded in eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict masterminded by Russia. The number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine increased to more than 1 million in the past month, with more than 60 per cent of them being women and children. The Government of Ukraine is doing everything possible to ensure the evacuation of children from areas in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk where they are at risk of militants' shelling and other outrages. Legislation is being drafted on strengthening social protection for children and families with children displaced from affected regions.

Ukraine reiterates its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child at the national and international levels. We reaffirm our support for, and appreciate the work being carried out by UNICEF, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui.

We would like to stress the vital importance of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, aimed at ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016. Ukraine fully supports the campaign. In that regard, we deem it necessary to further build on resolution 1612 (2005), and request the Secretary-General to include those parties to armed conflict that engage in abductions of children in the annexes to his reports on children and armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cambodia.

Mr. Tuy (Cambodia): First of all, allow me to express my congratulations to you, Mr. President,

on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month, and to thank you for organizing this important debate. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General for briefing the Security Council on this important issue, which can serve to make our discussion more comprehensive.

Cambodia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Further to the points made in the ASEAN statement, I wish to state that Cambodia, as a post-conflict country, is determined to protect children and their rights in situations of armed conflicts. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a signatory to its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in 1992, Cambodia believes that the United Nations should continue to work more to protect children in armed conflicts.

My delegation condemns all forms of violence perpetrated by the terrorist organizations, particularly violence against children. As the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security rests with the United Nations, we, as the international community, must fight this evil scourge resolutely. Furthermore, we must strengthen the existent legal instruments for the protection of children in armed conflicts. To that end, the Secretary-General's report and other relevant recommendatory documents should be based on clear, accurate and verifiable data.

As we debate here today, thousands of children are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts throughout the world. Some of those children were conscripted, and some were abducted and forced into combat. Yet others joined armed groups of their own volition, out of desperation, having been instilled with the erroneous ideology of non-State armed groups. Therefore, whether they partake in the violence and combat, or refuse to do so, children end up being trapped and victimized. To prevent the victimization of children, we must address the deep-rooted causes of conflict. Conflict prevention is the prerequisite for sustainable peace and respect for human rights. Poverty, discrimination, lack of education, social exclusion and inequality only perpetuate the cycle of violence.

The ongoing intergovernmental negotiation on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is an opportunity to address these issues. It can also inform the means of implementation on issues relating to the protection of children in armed conflicts. The post-2015 sustainable development agenda should continue to emphasize inclusive, equitable development and economic growth, aimed at effectively addressing inequalities and the factors underpinning them. In that way, it will contribute to creating a more inclusive, secure and peaceful world.

As stated here today, education should be viewed as a long-term investment. With knowledge, children can stay away from being recruited as combatants. Girls and boys embody the meaning of children. Since we are giving importance to gender equality, girls should also enjoy equal opportunities and equal access to education. Therefore, Cambodia is fully supportive of the "Let Girls Learn" initiative, as it has been envisaged and made well-known to the people of Cambodia by the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, during her recent three-day official cultural visit to Siem Reap province from 20 to 22 March.

Ending grave violations against children in armed conflict requires joint global action. The Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to working with our global partners, with Member States and with United Nations agencies in our effort to end the victimization of children by non-State armed groups. My delegation appreciates the dedicated work of the Council to advance the issue of the plight of children and to protect children's rights in situations of armed conflict. The tireless efforts of the Council will further advance our cause and help ensure that future generations of children live in freedom and in peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Hassan (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Council for this month and, through you, I would like to congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, for her briefing to the Council on the subject under discussion. The delegation of the Sudan would like to express its appreciation to the French presidency for organizing this open debate on children in armed conflict, with a focus on the victims of rebel movements. The Council has done well by tackling this important issue.

When we participated in the launch of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign last year we stated

that it should include rebel movements, and not confine itself to Government forces and the situations covered by the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General. It is well-known that the extent of aggression perpetrated against children and violations of the rights of children by my country's rebel movements in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states are taken up in the report. The extent of the violations in my country are incalculable; in fact, that has been mentioned. One such incident involved the abduction of 1,900 children by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North in South Kordofan last year. Such violations by the rebel movements are continuing.

The Council is well aware of what is going on, including the attempts to occupy the capital of the Sudan, Khartoum, in 2008. We greatly appreciated the Council's actions on several occasions in dealing with this matter, particularly on the first anniversary of the campaign to end the recruitment of children. We hope that they will be followed by steps and measures that will force the rebel movements to halt the violations, lay down their arms and have recourse to negotiations instead of armed conflict. We would like to commend the contents of section 4 of the presidency's concept note (S/2015/168, annex). The issues of protecting children and their rights are among our Government's priorities. A case in point is the long list of efforts and accomplishments undertaken by the Government.

First of all, at the level of international commitments, our Government has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child along with its two protocols concerning the protection of children in armed conflict and from commercial sexual exploitation. The Government of the Sudan also ratified two relevant conventions of the International Labour Organization: the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). The Government of the Sudan declared its support for the campaign organized by the Office of the Under-Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in partnership with UNICEF in early 2014. We also participated in the launch of that campaign here in New York.

Secondly, at the level of national legislation, the laws regulating the Sudanese armed forces and the police categorically prohibit the recruitment of children below the age of 18. Our Government established correctional justice for minors in 2010 when it enacted the law to protect children and set up prosecutorial offices to deliver justice to minors. At the level of child protection machinery, our Government has established units in the armed forces to protect children, as well as at the Ministry of the Interior. The Government established the National Council for Childhood, appointing a special prosecutor to investigate the crimes of Darfur and other allegations since the emergence of the conflict since 2003. It also established a fact-finding committee to investigate the abduction and recruitment of children in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. In July, the Government launched the tenth comprehensive national plan on promoting the rights of children in the Sudan.

At the level of outreach to international bodies dealing with children, we are in constant contact, through our Permanent Mission to the United Nations, with the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as with UNICEF. In that connection, I would like to refer to the meeting of our Minister for Social Affairs with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, addressing all concerns relating to children. In that regard, I recall the statement made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Zerrougui, on the efforts currently under way in the Sudan in cooperation with the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) aimed at preventing the rebel movements from recruiting children.

The Government of the Sudan is continuing its efforts to promote the status of children. To that end, the National Council on Child Care established a task force to investigate the situation of children. As part of its primary mandate, the task force is charged with addressing the situation of children in emergencies, in cooperation with UNICEF and UNAMID. At the same time, the National Council on Child Care held a workshop on internal cultures and their impact on the situation of children. Work is under way, in cooperation with the various agencies dealing with children, to finalize an action plan on children in areas of conflict.

In light of the policies to which we have just referred, as well as the steps and measures taken with regard to children, we request that our name be removed from the list included in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report.

If the issues of children are to be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner, we would like the following points to be taken into account. First, the Governments of States experiencing conflicts should

be assisted to end such conflicts by convincing or forcing armed rebel factions to lay down their arms and pursue negotiated solutions. Secondly, the root causes that lead to the recruitment of children or their truancy from school, including poverty, climate change, and the unfair, unilateral economic sanctions imposed on some States, along with other factors that lead to conflict, must be addressed. Further steps include relieving the debt burdens of developing countries, extending technological assistance and capacity-building to affected countries, support for education and reconstruction efforts, as well as utilizing the massive experience of the United Nations.

It is not enough for rebel movements to sign plans to end child recruitment; that will not end the violence that they perpetrate. Such measures must be accompanied by condemnation of the conduct of the rebel movements, and they must be forced to lay down their arms and participate in negotiations. Governments must be involved in any movement relating to the issue of children in conflict, and they must be able to work with such organizations in transparency and with full respect for national sovereignty.

In conclusion, we reiterate our commitment to continuing to cooperate with international bodies dealing with children and call for correct and verifiable information in the Secretary-General's reports, which must be devoid of controversial phrases such as those referring to military uniforms as well as other ambiguous references. In many cases, a military uniform is no longer the preserve of Government forces. We also demand that information and allegations be shared with Governments before they are incorporated into the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): I would like to thank France for its able leadership of the Council this month and for convening this important debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their informative statements.

On 16 December 2014, in a most inhuman and barbaric act, the enemies of Afghanistan massacred more than 120 people, all civilians, the majority of whom were children playing volleyball. Incidents like that are vivid examples of the profound impact that conflict has on the lives of children and the shadow that it casts over their daily lives. Violence cuts their childhood short and leaves them without their families and loved ones. Children are regularly the subjects of heinous acts of senseless terror carried out against mosques, markets, schools, homes and critical infrastructure in Afghanistan.

The continuing violent campaign against the Afghan people has had a profound and tragic effect on the lives of civilians. In 2014, over 10,000 civilians were killed or injured, with a sharp increase in child casualties by 48 per cent. Conflict in Afghanistan has engendered a situation in which young boys and girls are extremely vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups. The Taliban and other extremist groups use children as soldiers, spies and human shields. They use them to plant improvised explosive devices and roadside bombs, and they continue to cast a heinous gloom over their lives. Terrorist and extremist groups, including those that claim affiliation to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, regularly target children to carry out their evil agendas.

In flagrant violation of international law and the basic tenets of Islam, extremist groups continue to brutally attack schools, their staff and students, particularly women and girls. In 2014, as a result of their brutal campaign, 157 schools were destroyed, blown up and set on fire and 537 schools were closed as a result of threats by the Taliban and other extremist groups. Regrettably, those threats, coupled by poverty and unemployment, hinder children's access to education and make them more vulnerable to exploitation by extremists.

The impact of conflict on children extends beyond the risk of death or injury. Children whose families have been killed or incapacitated are often left as the sole breadwinners in the family. Therefore, in an attempt to provide for their own and their family's livelihoods, children often try to join the national and local police or the army, even through falsification of their age and identification so that they can serve.

Understanding these awful circumstances, my Government has taken major steps towards delivering on its commitments. Today, President Ghani, in his address to the United States Congress in Washington, D.C., once again reiterated the full commitment of the Afghan Government to protecting children, who are the future of our country. In a milestone step, in November 2014 the Government of Afghanistan enacted a law prohibiting underage recruitment in security

institutions, which was approved by the Afghan Parliament in February. The endorsement of a road map in August 2014 to accelerate the implementation of the action plan to end child recruitment into the security forces is a testament of our unwavering commitment in this regard. The culmination of these bold steps was the rejection, in 2014, of several hundred underage applicants who attempted to enlist in security institutions.

We have also put in place a series of measures to raise public awareness, including through the establishment of dozens of community-based school protection councils in provinces and through convening various seminars and workshops to train religious scholars, teachers, elders and students on the rights of children with the support of the international community. We are grateful for the technical and financial assistance of the United Nations, in particular UNICEF and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in this regard.

As our National Security Forces have assumed full responsibility for providing security throughout the country since the beginning of this year, the Government of Afghanistan is strongly committed to making every effort to ensure its forces' compatibility with international standards of which the prevention of underage recruitment is core. Therefore, bringing the underage recruitment in all security institutions to an absolute end is a top priority for the Government of Afghanistan. To this end, I would like to echo the call of my Government on the United Nations to consider the withdrawal of Afghan national and local police from the Secretary-General's black list.

Taking into account the enormous progress made in alleviating the impact of conflict on children in Afghanistan and the tremendous challenges ahead of us, the continued support of our international partners, their technical expertise and funding, in addition to their advocacy, are of paramount importance to our efforts. We thank our international friends and partners, particularly Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and her Office, for their support in this regard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Mr. Šćepanović (Montenegro): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate on children and armed conflict, and commend France's strong support and commitment to this issue. We also thank today's briefers for their inspiring presentations.

Montenegro aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I would like, however, to highlight some points of particular importance to my country.

We are witnessing the dramatic consequences of the violence affecting millions of children due to the evolving character of contemporary conflicts. We are at risk of losing entire generations in Syria, the Central African Republic, Iraq and South Sudan. Girls and boys are recruited by armed forces and armed groups, become the victims of indiscriminate attacks, or are subject to violent abuse. The Security Council has made significant progress in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda, but there is still a lot of work ahead of us in protecting the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and ensuring that perpetrators of grave violations against children are held to account.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It is also the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign that was launched to end the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces by 2016. The momentum and progress generated by the campaign are encouraging, but the remaining challenges are enormous to reach our objective. We must work together and share our expertise and resources so we can end child recruitment in the next two years.

It is also essential that the Council's Working Group continue to make the best use of its tools in order to provide appropriate responses to all types of grave violations, including those committed by non-State actors. In this regard, we would like to stress that Member States need to allow United Nations personnel access to areas controlled by armed non-State actors for the purpose of ending violations and concluding and implementing action plans.

We have seen an increasing trend of attacks on schools and the use of schools for military purposes, which we find alarming. Therefore, we welcome resolution 2143 (2014), highlighting the concern over the military use of schools. These attacks deprive children of their right to education and result in unspeakable

suffering for them. We use this opportunity to call on parties to armed conflict to refrain from these actions.

With respect to United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and the indispensable role they play, Montenegro would like to advocate for a strong child protection component to be incorporated in mission mandates. This would require peacekeepers, military and security personnel to receive specialized pre-deployment child protection training.

There is a need for more action in order to fight impunity for crimes committed against children. Therefore, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and national judicial authorities have an important role in responding to violations as they occur. It is also vital that the Security Council, to the extent possible, use the option to refer situations to the ICC and that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict further consider modalities to increase the pressure on persistent perpetrators of human rights violations and put an end to impunity.

Montenegro remains committed to contributing to our common and noble objective and providing the children of the world with a safer future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on children and armed conflict. Let me also thank all today's briefers for their insightful and moving statements, and commend Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ms. Leila Zerrougui's determined efforts to protect the rights of children trapped in conflicts.

As the briefers have noted, there has been some progress in the protection efforts in various hot spots. This includes the strengthened support to relative normative frameworks in the crises-affected countries; better integration of child protection in key mandated areas of peacekeeping operations; and global advocacy campaigning, such as that of "Children, Not Soldiers", just to name a few.

Despite that progress, important though it is, non-combatants, particularly children, continue to be exposed to great risk. Much needs to be done. I shall briefly outline a few key concerns. Once conflict begins, children are among the first to suffer from its effects and consequences. As long as a conflict continues, indiscriminate and deliberate attacks, losses and atrocities are inevitable. The Council should focus on the prevention, resolution, and most importantly, address the root causes of conflict.

All parties to a conflict should implement their commitments under international humanitarian law and cease violence against civilians, especially children. Ceasefire agreements can be an important practical step toward curbing violence; however, it is only a temporary measure and does not guarantee the safety and security of civilians. Twenty years after the signing of the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that agreement is violated regularly. Our children have been targets of both indiscriminate and deliberate attacks.

As a result of sniper fire alone, Fariz Badalov, a nine-year-old boy, was killed in Agdam. Aygun Shahmaliyeva, a 13-year-old girl, was killed in the Alibayli village of the Tovuz region bordering Armenia, when a bomb implanted in a toy exploded. In August 2014, five-year-old Mujan Ariba, 17-year-old Farid Mammadov, 14-year-old Sahans Malov, 15-year-old Shahlalah Tariba, 10-year-old Aushkara Basov were seriously wounded by Armenian snipers. The list is not exhaustive; it merely illustrates recent examples.

Combating impunity is important, not only for the purposes of prosecuting such crimes and bringing those responsible to justice, but also for ensuring sustainable peace, truce and reconciliation. We join the call for efforts to be stepped up at all levels to reduce the grave impact of conflicts on children, and to uphold justice by bringing to account those who perpetrate crimes against children, including non-State actors and those who fuel them, both ideologically and financially. Education and outreach campaigns can be effective tools for protecting children from violence and abuse, both during intensive and passive phases of armed conflict. The promotion of hatred in speech, ideas of ethnic incompatibility and racial superiority perpetuate the vicious cycle of violence. Those who promote such intolerance also entrap their population in poverty and underdevelopment.

Particular consideration should be given to internally displaced children in terms of ensuring the inalienable right of return, and to the implication of illegal policies and practices in situations of foreign occupation, for the protection of children's rights. In addition, determining the fate of children taken hostage and reported missing in situations of armed conflict,

as well as searching for them and reuniting them with their families are other aspects of the problem that require urgent action.

Azerbaijan is ready to support efforts aimed at safeguarding the rights of children. We will continue to work with the international community to achieve that objective.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Malenga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to express my deep satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, preside over the Security Council during the month of March, and to tell you how pleased we are to see France lead today's Council deliberations. I would also like to thank you for holding this debate on children and armed conflict, thereby affording my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the opportunity to speak on an issue that continues to be one of our priorities. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other speakers for their respective statements. Finally, my thanks go to Mr. Junior Nzita for his testimony.

Allow me to note here that the repeated outbreaks of war experienced by my country are at the origin of various forms of atrocities experienced by children in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo still occupied by armed groups. Indeed, Congolese children who have been or continue to be detained by armed groups have lived through and continue to experience psychologically traumatic events. They are helpless eyewitnesses of horrible scenes of violence during which their family members and friends are killed before their eyes.

Thousands of child victims of violent attacks by armed groups have suffered massive moral damage and material damage. Many are used as combatants, messengers, sex slaves, spies, traffickers or transporters of munitions. Some are also used to crush stones in quarries in order to make gravel. Once the stones are crushed, the coltan is used in electronic devices. The high level of radioactivity of those substances explains the frequency of the sometimes fatal respiratory problems suffered by a large number of Congolese children who crush and transport coltan. Those who survive remain traumatized by the acts of vandalism and barbarity perpetrated against them by armed groups to which they fell victim. Moreover, children displaced by conflict have virtually no access to education, which makes them even more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups.

Mindful of this tragic situation experienced by children, my Government, with the support of international partners, including the United Nations, is committed to combating violations of children's rights. Its initial efforts consisted in putting an end to that problem within our army. To that end, my Government has launched several initiatives. Strongly determined to eradicate the problem, it has made the necessary political commitment, leading to the appointment by the President of the Republic, Joseph Kabila, of a Personal Representative in charge of the fight against sexual violence and child recruitment.

The efforts of my Government to end this issue continue. In that regard, my country has supported the United Nation global "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF organized in 2014 with a view to eradicating the recruitment and use of children in conflict by Government security forces by the end of 2016.

My Government is also committed to the fight to eradicate the negative forces and armed groups that, to a certain degree, constitute the root causes of the issue. Furthermore, my Government also places special emphasis on the fight against impunity for serious crimes committed against children, and has established new courts for children in 10 provinces in the country. In the same effort to strengthen the protection of children, the Government has decided to make the six grave violations of the rights of children in armed conflict a criterion for disqualification for membership in our armed forces. Those strong initiatives to support children's rights have had significant results, including the arrest and conviction of high-ranking officers in our armed forces and the national police.

In conclusion, my Government is determined to pursue its efforts to implement its action plan to eradicate the recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups, as well as other grave violations of children's rights. In that regard, my country would like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her dedication to the cause of children. My country also welcomes the excellent cooperation it has developed with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in

Conflict, the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, the MONUSCO team for child protection and UNICEF. My country expresses its deep gratitude to all these partners.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Benin.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): I would like to first of all congratulate France for taking the initiative to organize this meeting on the plight of children in armed conflict, a theme specifically centred on child victims of non-State armed groups. I welcome the remarks of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which highlight the nature and the extent of the phenomenon, the efforts by the United Nations and its future work on the issue. I pay tribute to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Yoko Brandt, Deputy Director General of UNICEF, whose remarks commanded our full attention. I welcome the representatives of civil society organizations, including Ms. Julie Bodin, and the highly moving testimony by Mr. Junior Nzita.

Benin aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the African Union.

The United Nations and the international community are moving towards the celebration, in July 2015, of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), through which the Security Council established a monitoring and reporting mechanism and a Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We will mark, in March, the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. We will assess the level of commitment of the various stakeholders and the progress made and explore new avenues for work that is as efficient as possible.

Benin, which in 2005 introduced and participated in the negotiations on resolution 1612 (2005), is delighted to have been able to promote a mechanism that continues to prove its effectiveness. We hope that this trend will continue and be strengthened so as to enable us to achieve the lofty goals that our Organization has set, namely eradicating the phenomenon of child soldiers. Significant progress has been made since then. However, 10 years after the resolution's adoption, the phenomenon of child soldiers unfortunately persists. I salute the commitment of people of good will who have worked to strengthen the mechanism, to expand its jurisdiction and to support the work of the Council's Working Group.

The nature of armed conflict and the tactics used by combatants have changed dramatically. I would note in particular the lack of clearly defined battlefields, the increased diversity of parties to the conflict, and the fact that places such as schools and hospitals, which traditionally were shelters, are now deliberately targeted. Children and students are kidnapped, enlisted and indoctrinated. For example, there is extremist sect Boko Haram's standard procedure of using children as suicide bombs to carry out terrorist attacks. That extremist sect massacres children on a daily basis by destroying schools, health centres and entire villages and carries out massive abductions of girls in order to force them into marriage, slavery or to carry explosives.

My country believes that, in order for the fight against the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict to be effective, it must incorporate both universal adherence to relevant international instruments and scrupulous respect for them, as stated so clearly in the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which Benin fully supports.

States should also place particular emphasis on strengthening national mechanisms for resilience and the protection of children and should raise further awareness about the harmful effects of the practice. It is important to firmly combat extremist movements such as Boko Haram. Military action must continue to go hand in hand with diplomatic efforts to secure the release, recovery and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict. The United Nations must continue to explore the most appropriate channels to make contact with non-State armed groups so as to lead them to commit to sparing children from recruitment and violent action. In this regard, we strongly support the ongoing work by the United Nations and civil society to increase the number of non-State groups and Governments concerned that are signing agreements and action plans to put an end violence against children and negotiate the release of those already enlisted.

We must work to find suitable formulas and mechanisms for the sustainable reintegration of demobilized children. To that end, it is important that the United Nations ensure that peace agreements contain firm commitments to children in the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

programmes so as to ensure that they are integrated into normal working life in a rewarding manner and able to obtain the resources necessary to sustain their existence and achieve their full development.

The recognition of the recruitment and use of children in conflict as a crime against humanity opens the way for prosecution. We must work to strengthen legal action, through advanced legal cooperation aimed at depriving criminals any sanctuary and bringing them before international criminal courts. The International Criminal Court should be encouraged to seize itself of such cases and prosecute the perpetrators of such crimes. In this respect, it is important to welcome the judgement of the International Criminal Court against Thomas Lubanga for conscripting, enlisting and using child soldiers. That judgement is, without a doubt, a very strong message that shows the determination of the international community to put an end to this shameful practice.

On 3 August 1990, the Government of Benin ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in New York on 20 November 1989, and later ratified its 2000 Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Benin has also has a legal code for children that protects them against any practice that could endanger their physical and moral integrity, including their involvement in armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Gabon.

Mrs. Onanga (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I must congratulate you, Mr. President, on two counts: first, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council; and secondly for your initiative in holding this debate. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, for his determination to make this cause a major focus of his work. I would like to also thank Ms. Zerrougui for her determination to advance our work to ensure that children are not soldiers. I would also like to pay tribute to UNICEF, whose contribution we welcome. Finally, I commend Ms. Julie Bodin and Mr. Junior Nzita for their respective statements.

Gabon strongly condemns all forms of violence against children committed by parties to armed conflict in violation of international law, including the recruitment, employment, murder, mutilation, abduction, sexual violence, attacks against schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children. It is undisputable that the suffering of children at the hands of non-State armed groups, particularly extremist groups, shocks and casts doubt on the humanity of their tormentors. Multiple violations against girls, in particular, are a true abomination.

Already traumatized by war as a vulnerable population, children are more directly involved in armed violence as actors who are obviously being manipulated. The real perpetrators of these crimes doubly hurt their victims; they rob children not only of their innocence, but also what is most dear to them, namely, their dream of a world where they could flourish in peace, security and respect for their dignity. No cause, however important it may be, can justify the abduction of children torn from the affection of their families, as is the case in the sisterly republic of Nigeria, where the Boko Haram terrorist network kidnaps, uses and murders children.

The international community has a duty to act quickly and vigorously to safeguard the future of our children, first of all preventively, particularly through education, in order to fight poverty, which is a possible factor in the incitement of young people to voluntarily join armed groups. Other factors include discrimination, the affirmation of an ethnic, tribal or religious identity or the attractiveness of the idea of the heroic death of a martyr.

In addition, Gabon has readily responded to the Council's call for support for the Principles and Guidelines on Children associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, known as the Paris Principles; we fully support them and pay particular attention to ensuring respect for all international instruments aimed at the protection of children.

My country also welcomes the 17 September 2013 agreement signed by the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in close collaboration with UNICEF, which is of paramount importance to better protecting African children affected by conflict and to strengthening protection mechanisms, while the African Union plays an increasingly expansive role in mediation and peacekeeping operations on the continent.

Finally, it is important to strengthen effective measures to protect children that are adapted to the circumstances in which they live. Where large parts of a country's territory are beyond the control of the

State, the message of the international community should be clear — the responsibility of non-State armed group remains fully binding, and no impunity should be tolerated, including through sanctions arrangements. Measures to extend State authority are also essential, including through mechanisms for the monitoring and communication of information in cases of grave violations against children in armed conflict, pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), and for registering perpetrators of violations of children's rights in the lists annexed to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict — the so-called lists of shame — in accordance with resolutions 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011).

The prosecution of perpetrators before national and international courts, such as the International Criminal Court and the Special Courts, as well as the care of demobilized child soldiers, are also part of our effort to fight against violence and rejection of which children are victims. Furthermore, a good education, fair justice and a decent job will in the end allow young people to rebuild themselves, dream of a better future and break the cycle of violence.

My delegation expresses the hope that today's effort at mobilizing will be the expression of the reassertion of an additional push for solidarity from the international community on behalf of children, many of them girls, who have unfortunately been forced to endure the torments of armed conflicts which they do not understand.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the Russian Federation has requested the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The statement made by the representative of Ukraine has shown once again that his delegation is trying to exploit any opportunity it can to repeat its baseless insinuations against Russia. His remarks are particularly cynical when they are made in the context of a debate on the situation of children and the provision of assistance to them. According to the Ukrainian delegation's immoral logic, assistance for children — whose suffering is caused by the Kyiv authorities' broad-based operations against the population of the eastern regions — is totally unacceptable.

I will not comment on all that was said by the representative of Ukraine — let that lie with his conscience — but our position has been made clear on many occasions. Nevertheless, I would like to point out the following. The adoption of a number of measures for implementing the Minsk Agreements allowed for the de-escalation of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. We sincerely hope that there will no more child victims or any others as a result of the conflict. For this to be the case, it will be necessary for the February agreement to be fully complied with.

It is clear, however, that, more than a month after the Agreement was signed, the Kyiv authorities still have not implemented any serious measures to stabilize the situation of people affected by the conflict in eastern Ukraine, including children. The Donetsk and Luhansk regions remain blockaded. How are we to interpret the fact that pensions remain unpaid, no attempt to restart the banking system or reopen socioeconomic and social communications links has been made, and food, medical and other supplies remain undelivered?

It has been noted that, after the start of military action, children were no longer receiving vaccinations. Worse, the restrictions that the Kyiv authorities have imposed on the movement of people and goods in regions that they do not control create obstacles to the delivery of assistance to the population of these regions, including children. According to the human rights monitors and representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees working in these areas, it is crucial that these and other problems be addressed immediately. It is clear that many children, including disabled children, need immediate medical attention. I call on the Ukrainian delegation to address these problems.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Ms. Shilo (Israel): I feel compelled to briefly rebut the accusations against Israel that have been made in the course of today's discussions.

It was surprising to hear the Palestinian representative talk about Gaza without once mentioning Hamas. The facts could not be clearer. Hamas has fired tens of thousands of rockets into Israel. Children in southern Israel continue to live under the constant threat of rocket attacks. Instead of playing outside, as all children should do, they practice running to shelters in less than 15 seconds to save themselves. In Gaza, Hamas uses schools and hospitals to store rockets and then fires those same rockets at our schools for the purpose of

killing and maiming our children. By using Gaza's children as human shields, Hamas intentionally puts them in the front line.

On the other hand, Israel does its utmost to minimize and protect not only our own children but Palestinian children as well. Ignoring these crimes does not favour the Palestinian children. Yet, again in this Council, we have seen time and time again that blaming Israel is easier than taking meaningful steps to improve the situation on the ground.

Finally, if the Palestinian Authority is so eager to find a peaceful solution, based on the two-State principle, why did it form a unity Government with Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization that voted for the destruction of the State of Israel? The levelling of accusations against Israel will not solve fundamental issues in the Middle East and will not bring us closer to resolving the core challenges facing our region. In fact, it only drags us further away from achieving the peaceful future that our children deserve.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now call on him.

Mr. Yaremenko (Ukraine): I would like to reply to the comments by my Russian colleague, and will do so in Russian in order to deliver my statement clearly.

(*spoke in Russian*)

In the information war that has been launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, my country, has been using the only "weapon" available to it, and we are using for defensive purposes. We are simply telling the truth. There is one concept in international relations that seems to me to be a key one, and that is trust. It is extremely difficult to build trust, but it is also extremely easy to destroy it. I would like to recall to all those here that not so long ago, Russia produced a documentary film, *Crimea. Road to the Motherland*, and the President of Russia, Mr. Putin, explained in detail the special operation by means of which Russia was going to annex a part of Ukrainian territory. I am referring to the autonomous territory of Crimea.

If I am not mistaken, this is the fourth Russian version issued by the head of the Russian State about the events that took place a year ago. I would like to recall that there were no Russian military forces in Crimea at the time of the events. The bases housing Ukrainian forces, Ukrainian administrative buildings, ships of the Ukrainian fleet and Ukrainian infrastructure were seized by armed militias.

I believe that after such a permanent change in the position of the Russian Federation, comments on its statements are hardly necessary. What I would like to re-emphasize is that, if what happened a year ago had not happened, we would not be discussing the problems of children in specific areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

The President (*spoke in French*): The observer of the Observer State of Palestine has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now call on her.

Ms. Mansour (Palestine): I believe that Palestine's statement today sufficiently refuted what was said today by the representatives of Israel and that it conveyed the stark, disturbing and bitter reality of life for Palestinian children and their families under Israeli occupation. The perpetration of those brutal and illegal acts by the occupying Power is well documented, not just by the children and people of Palestine, who have had to endure the misery of living under the occupation every day for nearly 50 years, but also by the various organs, agencies and committees of the United Nations system monitoring the situation in the occupied State of Palestine, as well as by countless human-rights organizations around the world, including several Israeli organizations.

Israel makes absurd and unacceptable assertions and claims that the Palestinian people incite their children or send their children out to be in harm's way. That is typical behaviour from an occupying Power whose policy is to dehumanize the Palestinian people — implying that they do not love their children in the way that other people love their children. That is typical racist behaviour from a belligerent occupier. It is instead Israel that is harming our children in every respect. If they are not killing or causing injury to them, they are arresting them, demolishing their homes and denying them their right to education, health, food, clean water and development. They are putting them in harm's way by using them as human shields, which has been documented by Defence for Children International Palestine.

That was the case this past summer during Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip. A story emerged of a 16 year-old boy, Ahmad Abu Raida, who was used as a human shield by Israeli occupying forces. For five

days, Israeli occupying forces forced him — at gunpoint — to repeatedly act as a human shield for them in Gaza. That was in addition to his being unjustifiably subjected to detention, interrogation, beatings, torture and deprivation of food, water and sleep. There are many other stories like that one.

We continue to condemn the killing and violence against all children — Palestinian and Israeli — and we call on the Israeli side to do the same. When all is said and done, the only way to give both Palestinian and Israeli children the security and lives they both deserve is for Israel to end its occupation and to cease all of its violations against the Palestinian people. It is when both peoples live in freedom and security in their own States that we will be on the road of real peace and stability. We are still committed to the two-State solution. The other side's commitment is in question. We owe it to both Palestinian and Israeli children and the generations to come.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Zagaynov (*spoke in Russian*): Given that it is quite late, I will be very brief.

I would like to thank the representative of Ukraine for his lecture on current international relations, but he need not worry — we understand English as well. I would also like to point out that what he said has no link whatsoever with the topic of today's discussion.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.